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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Light at Three O'Clock
by MACKINLAY KANTOR

The Worst Crime in the World
by G. K. CHESTERTON

Ghost of a Chance
by FREDERICK NEBEL

The Sequel to Murder
by ANTHONY GILBERT

The Prince of Cherkessia
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE FRIGHTENED MILLIONAIRE

A NEW SHORT NOVEL by CRAIG RICE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

IF YOU OCCASIONALLY seem to notice a certain sameness in our list of contributors, the reasons should not surprise you:

1. Obviously and by definition, there are only a limited number of writers who can be called tops in their craft of the detective story.
2. Out of those, unfortunately, a large proportion seldom, and some never, write anything shorter than a full-length novel.

Since we are dedicated to choosing only from the best, and are limited by our format to a short or at the outside medium length, there are not an infinite number of writers we can draw upon, and there never will be.

But I hardly think this should bother anyone when we are able to star such an author as Craig Rice once again, with such an established and beloved character as Mr. John J. Malone, in such a brand-new novelet as THE FRIGHTENED MILLIONAIRE. The leap between a million-dollar lawsuit arising from an auto accident and a murdered sailor in Mr. Malone's secretary's home bridges the kind of imaginative gulf that nobody can take in stride more nimbly than Craig Rice. If this be monotony (to strain a paraphrase) let us make the most of it.

MacKinlay Kantor, whose *Andersonville* is currently high in the best-seller lists, is another writer who has been with us before. In his autobiography, Mr. Kantor makes no closet skeleton about the fact that in his early days he wrote detective stories almost exclusively. After reading THE LIGHT AT THREE O'CLOCK, some of us selfish aficionados may wish he had stayed with them ever since.

Frederick Nebel, also a regular with us, does it again in GHOST OF A CHANCE, a free-swinging cops-and-gangsters novelet in the typically American *Black Mask* tradition; while the diametrically opposite leisured, scholarly, British style of suspense is delightfully presented in THE SEQUEL TO MURDER by famed Anthony Gilbert.

G. K. Chesterton and his immortal Father Brown are another couple of old favorites whose reappearance we see no need to apologize for. You may not agree with their definition of THE WORST CRIME IN THE WORLD, but you cannot fail to be both fascinated and stimulated by their handling of it.

Of course, the Saint and I get into these pages so inevitably that there is hardly anything for me to say about THE PRINCE OF CHERKESSIA except that I think it's a hell of a neat little story. That's a privilege that goes with editing your own magazine.

Leslie Charteris

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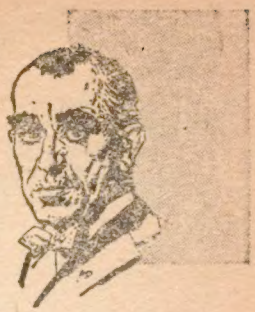

by Albert Dorne

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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1956
VOL. 5, NO. 4

The Prince of Cherkessia 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Nine's My Lucky Number 15
by FERDINAND REYHER

The Light at Three O'Clock 20
by MACKINLAY KANTOR

The Sequel to Murder 31
by ANTHONY GILBERT

The Frightened Millionaire 38
by CRAIG RICE

The Worst Crime in the World 76
by G. K. CHESTERTON

Ghost of a Chance 91
by FREDERICK NEBEL

By a Thread 140
by ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Laura Rarely Takes Chances 148
by NORMAN DANIELS

What's New in Crime 157
by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

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Supervising Editor

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The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

the prince of cherkessia

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Inspector Teal knew that Templar had only to read about the Prince of Cherkessia to become enraged. Could any threat be more dreadful?

OF THE GRAY hairs which bloomed in the thinning thatch of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, there were at least a couple of score which he could attribute directly to an equal number of encounters with the Saint. Mr. Teal did not actually go so far as to call them by name and celebrate their birthdays, for he was not by nature a whimsical man; but he had no doubts about their origin.

The affair of the Prince of Cherkessia gave him the forty-first—or it may have been the forty-second.

His Highness arrived in London without any preliminary publicity; but he permitted a number of reporters to interview him at his hotel after his arrival. The copy which he provided had a sensation value which no self-respecting news editor could ignore.

It started before the assembled pressmen had drunk more than half the champagne which was provided for them in the Prince's suite, which still stands as a record for any reception of that type. It was started by a cub reporter, no more ignorant than the rest,

IN A SPIRITED MYSTERY ESCAPADE, UNSCATHED BY TIME, THE SAINT RISKS HIS HALO FOR A PRINCELY CROWN

Copyright, 1934, by Leslie Charteris

From THE SAINT INTERVENES, published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

but more honest about it, who had not been out on that kind of assignment long enough to learn that the serious business of looking for a story is not supposed to mar the general conviviality while there is anything left to drink.

"Where," asked this revolutionary spirit brazenly, with his mouth full of *foie gras*, "is Cherkessia?"

The Prince raised his Mephistophelian eyebrows. "You," he replied, with faint contempt, "would probably know it better as Circassia."

At the sound of his answer a silence spread over the room. The name rang bells, even in journalistic heads. The cub gulped down the rest of his sandwich without tasting it; and one reporter was so far moved as to put down a glass which was only half empty.

"It is a small country between the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea," said the Prince. "Once it was larger; but it has been eaten away by many invaders. The Turks and the Russians have robbed us piecemeal of most of our lands—although it was the Tartars themselves who gave my country its name, from their word *Chertkess*, which means 'robbers.' That ancient insult was long since turned to glory by my ancestor Schamyl, whose name I bear; and in the paltry lands which are still left to me the proud traditions of our race are carried on to this day."

The head of the reporter who had put down his glass was buzzing with vague memories.

"Do you still have beautiful Circassians?" he asked hungrily.

"Of course," said the Prince. "For a thousand years our women have been famed for their beauty. Even today, we export many hundreds annually to the most distinguished harems in Arabia—a royal tax on these transactions," added the Prince, with engaging simplicity, "has been of great assistance to our national budget."

The reporter swallowed, and retrieved his glass hurriedly; and the cub who had started it all asked, with bulging eyes: "What other traditions do you have, Your Highness?"

"Among other things," said the Prince, "we are probably the only people today among whom the *droit de seigneur* survives. That is to say that every woman in my country belongs to me, if and when I choose to take her, for as long as I choose to keep her in my palace."

"And do you still exercise that right?" asked another journalist, with ecstatic visions of headlines floating through his mind.

The Prince smiled, as he might have smiled at the naivety of a child.

"If the girl is sufficiently attractive—of course. It is a divine

right bestowed upon my family by Mohammed himself. In my country it is considered an honor to be chosen, and the marriageable value of any girl on whom I bestow my right is greatly increased by it."

From that moment the reception was a historic success; and the news that one reason for the Prince's visit was to approve the final details of a new £100,000 crown which was being prepared for him by a West End firm of jewellers was almost an anticlimax.

Chief Inspector Teal read the full interview in his morning paper the following day. He was so impressed with its potentialities that he made a personal call on the Prince that afternoon.

"Is this really the interview you gave, Your Highness?" he asked, when he had introduced himself, "or are you going to repudiate it?"

Prince Schamyl took the paper and read it through. He was a tall well-built man with a pointed black beard and twirled black mustaches like a seventeenth-century Spanish grandee. When he had finished reading he handed the paper back with a slight bow, and fingered his mustaches in some perplexity.

"Why should I repudiate it?" he inquired. "It is exactly what I said."

Teal chewed for a moment on the spearmint which even in the presence of royalty he could not deny himself; and then he said: "In that case, Your Highness, would you be good enough to let us give you police protection?"

The Prince frowned puzzledly. "But are not all people in this country protected by the police?"

"Naturally," said Teal. "But this is rather a special case. Have you ever heard of the Saint?"

Prince Schamyl shrugged. "I have heard of several."

"I don't mean that kind of saint," the detective told him grimly. "The Saint is the name of a notorious criminal we have here, and something tells me that as soon as he sees this interview he'll be making plans to steal this crown you're buying. If I know anything about him, the story that you make some of your money out of selling girls to harems, and that you exercise this *droit de seigneur,* whatever that is, would be the very thing to put him on your tracks."

"But, please," said the Prince in ingenuous bewilderment, "what is wrong with our customs? My people have been happy with them for hundreds of years."

"The Saint wouldn't approve of them," said Teal with conviction, and realized the hopelessness of entering upon a discussion of morals with such a person. "Anyhow, sir, I'd be very much obliged if you would let us give you a special guard

until you take your crown out of the country."

The Prince shook his head, as if the incomprehensible customs of England baffled him to speechlessness.

"In my country there are no notorious criminals," he said, "because as soon as a criminal is known he is beheaded. However, I shall be glad to help you in any way I can. The crown is to be delivered here tomorrow, and you may place as many guards in my suite as you think necessary."

The news that four special detectives had been detailed to guard the Prince of Cherkessia's crown was published in an evening paper which Simon Templar was reading at a small and exclusive dinner at which the morning paper's interview was also discussed.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist it," said Patricia Holm fatalistically, "directly I saw the headlines. You're that sort of idiot."

Simon looked at her mockingly. "Idiot?" he queried. "My dear Pat, have you ever known me to be anything but sober and judicious?"

"Often," said his lady candidly. "I've also known you to walk into exactly the same trap. I'll bet you anything you like that Teal made up the whole story just to get a rise out of you, and the Prince'll turn out to be another detective with a false beard."

"You'd lose your money," said the Saint calmly. "Teal is as worried about it as you are, and if you like to drop in at Vazey's on Bond Street or make discreet inquiries at the Southshire Insurance Company, you'll find that that crown genuinely is costing a hundred thousand pounds and is insured for the same amount. It's rather pleasant to think that the Southshire will have to stand the racket, because their ninety per cent underwriter is a very scaly reptile named Percy Quiltan, whose morals are even more repulsive than Prince Schamyl's. And the Prince's are bad enough. . . . No, Pat, you can't convince me that that tin hat isn't legitimate boodle; and I'm going to have it."

A certain Peter Quentin, who was also present, sighed, and turned the sigh into a resigned grin. "But how d'you propose to do it?" he asked.

The Saint's blue eyes turned on him with an impish twinkle. "I seem to remember that you retired from this business some months ago, Peter," he murmured. "A really respectable citizen wouldn't be asking that question with so much interest. However, since your beautiful wife is away —if you'd like to lend a hand, you could help me a lot."

"But what's the plan?" insisted Patricia.

Simon Templar smiled. "We are going to dematerialize ourselves," he said blandly. "Covetous but invisible, we shall lift the crown of Cherkessia from under Claud Eustace's very nose, and put it on a shelf in the fourth dimension."

She was no wiser when the party broke up some hours later. Simon informed her that he and Peter Quentin would be moving into Prince Schamyl's hotel to take up residence there for a couple of days. But she knew that they would not be there under their own names, and the rest of his plan remained wrapped in the maddening mystery with which the Saint's sense of the theatrical too often required him to tantalize his confederates.

Chief Inspector Teal would have been glad to know even as little as Patricia; but the evidence which came before him was far less satisfactory. It consisted of a plain postcard, addressed to Prince Schamyl, on which had been drawn a skeleton figure crowned with a rakishly tilted halo. A small arrow pointed to the halo, and at the other end of the arrow was written in neat copperplate the single word: *"Thursday."*

"If the Saint says he's coming on Thursday, he's coming on Thursday," Teal stated definitely, in a private conference to which he was summoned when the card arrived.

Prince Schamyl elevated his shoulders and spread out his hands. "I do not attempt to understand your customs, Inspector. In my country, if we require evidence, we beat the criminal with rods until he provides it."

"You can't do that in this country," said Teal, as if he wished you could. "That postcard wouldn't be worth tuppence in a court of law—not with the sort of lawyers the Saint could afford to engage. We couldn't prove that he sent it. We know it's his trade-mark, but the very fact that everybody in England knows the same thing would be the weakest point in our case. The prosecutor could never make the jury believe that a crook as clever as the Saint is supposed to be would send out a warning that could be traced back to him so easily.

"The Saint knows it, and he's been trading on it for years—it's the strongest card in his hand. If we arrested him on evidence like that, he'd only have to swear that the card was a fake—that some other crook had sent it out as a blind—and he could make a fool of anyone who tried to prove it wasn't. Our only chance is to catch him more or less red-handed. One of these days he'll go too far, and I'm only hoping it'll be on Thursday."

Teal thumbed the pages of a cheap pocket diary, although he had no need to remind himself of dates.

"This is Wednesday," he said. "You can say that Thursday begins any time after midnight. I'll be here at twelve o'clock myself, and I'll stay here till midnight tomorrow."

Mr. Teal was more worried than he would have cared to admit. The idea that even such a satanic ingenuity as he knew the Saint to possess could contrive a way of stealing anything from under the eyes of a police guard who had been forewarned that he was coming for it was obviously fantastic. It belonged to sensational fiction, to the improbable world of Arsène Lupin.

Arsène Lupin would have disguised himself as Chief Inspector Teal or the Chief Commissioner, and walked out with the crown under his arm. But Teal knew that such miracles of impersonation only happened in the romances of unscrupulous and reader-cheating authors. And yet he knew the Saint too well, he had crossed swords too often with that amazing brigand of the twentieth century, to derive any solid consolation from that thought.

When he came back to the hotel that night, he checked over his defenses as seriously as if he had been guarding the premier of a great European power from threatened assassination. There were men posted at the entrances of the hotel, and one at a strategic point in the lobby which covered the stairs and elevators. A Flying Squad car stood outside. Every member of the hotel staff who would be serving the Prince during the next twenty-four hours had been investigated.

A burly detective paced the corridor outside the Prince's suite, and two more equally efficient men were posted inside. Teal added himself to the last number. The £100,000 crown of Cherkessia reposed in a velvet-lined box on a table in the sitting-room of the suite—Teal had unsuccessfully attempted more than once to induce Prince Schamyl to authorize its removal to a safe-deposit or even to Scotland Yard itself.

"Where is the necessity?" inquired the Prince blankly. "You have your detectives everywhere. Are you afraid that they will be unable to cope with this absurd criminal?"

Teal had no answer. He was afraid—there was a gloomy premonition creeping around his brain that the Saint could not have helped foreseeing all his precautions, and therefore must have discovered a loophole long in advance. That was the reason why he had studiously withheld even a rumor of the Saint's threat from the Press, for he had his own stolid vanity. But he could not tell the Prince that.

He glowered morosely at the private detective who had been added to the contingent by the

Southshire Insurance Company, a brawny broken-nosed individual with a mustache like the handlebars of a bicycle, who was pruning his nails with a penknife in the corner. He began to ask himself whether those battered and belligerently whiskered features could by any feat of make-up have been imposed with putty and spirit gum on the face of the Saint or any of his known associates; and then the detective looked up and encountered his devouring stare with symptoms of such pardonable alarm that Teal hastily averted his eyes.

"Surely," said the Prince, who still appeared to be striving to get his bearings, "if you are really anticipating an attack from this criminal, and he is so well known to you, his movements are being watched?"

"I wish I could say they were," said Teal glumly. "As soon as that postcard arrived I went after him myself, but he appears to have left the country. Anyhow, he went down to Hanworth last night, where he keeps an airplane, and went off in it; and he hasn't been back since. Probably he's only fixing up an alibi—"

Even as he uttered the theory, the vision of a helicopter flashed into his mind. The hotel was a large tall building, with a spacious roof garden—with the latest type of whirlybird it might have been possible to land and take off there. Teal had a sudden wild desire to post more detectives on the roof—even to ask for special planes to patrol the skies over the hotel. He laughed himself out of the planes, but he went downstairs and picked up one of the men he had posted in the lobby.

"Go up and watch the roof," he ordered. "I'll send someone to relieve you at eight o'clock."

The man nodded obediently and went off, but he gave Teal a queer look in parting which made the detective realize how deeply the Saint superstition had got into his system. The realization did not make Mr. Teal any better pleased with himself, and his manner when he returned to the royal suite was almost surly.

"We'd better watch in turns," he said. "There are twenty-four hours to go, and the Saint may be banking on waiting until near the end of the time when we're all tired and thinking of giving it up."

Schamyl yawned. "I am going to bed," he said. "If anything happens, you may inform me."

Teal watched the departure of the lean black-hawk figure, and wished he could have shared the Prince's tolerant boredom with the whole business. One of the detectives who watched the crown, at a sign from Teal, curled up on the settee and closed his eyes. The private watchdog of the Southshire Insurance lolled back in his chair; very soon

his mouth fell open, and a soporific buzzing emanated from his throat and caused his handlebar mustaches to vibrate in unison.

Chief Inspector Teal paced up and down the room, fashioning a wedge of chewing gum into endless intricate shapes with his teeth and tongue. The exercise did not fully succeed in soothing his nerves. His brain was haunted by memories of the buccaneer whom he knew only too well—the rakish carving of the brown handsome face, the mockery of astonishingly clear blue eyes, the gay smile that came so easily to the lips, the satirical humor of the gentle dangerous voice.

He had seen all those things too often ever to forget them—had been deceived, maddened, dared, defied, and outwitted by them in too many adventures to believe that their owner would ever be guilty of an empty hoax. And the thought that the Saint was roving at large that night was not comforting. The air above Middlesex had literally swallowed him up, and he might have been anywhere between Berlin and that very room.

When the dawn came Teal was still awake. The private detective's handlebars ceased vibrating with a final snort. The officer on the couch woke up, and the one who had kept the night watch took his place. Teal himself was far too wrought up to think of seizing his own chance to rest. Ten o'clock arrived before the Prince's breakfast, and Schamyl came through from his bedroom as the waiter was laying the table.

He peered into the box where the crown was packed, and stroked his beard with an ironical glint in his eyes.

"This is very strange, Inspector," he remarked. "The crown has not been stolen! Can it be that your criminal has broken his promise?"

With some effort, Teal kept his retort to himself. While the Prince attacked his eggs with a healthy appetite, Teal sipped a cup of coffee and munched on a slice of toast. For the hundredth time he surveyed the potentialities of the apartment. The bedroom and the sitting-room opened on either side of a tiny private hall, with the bathroom in between. The hall had a door into the corridor, outside which another detective was posted; there was no other entrance or exit except the open windows overlooking Hyde Park, through which the morning sun was streaming. The possibility of secret panels or passages was absurd.

The furniture was modernistically plain, expensive, and comfortable. There was a chesterfield, three armchairs, a couple of smaller chairs, a writing desk, the center table on which breakfast was laid, and a small side

table on which stood the box containing the crown of Cherkessia. Not even a very small thief could have secreted himself in or behind any of the articles. Nor could he plausibly slip through the guards outside.

Therefore, if he was to make good his boast, it seemed as if he must be inside already; and Teal's eyes turned again to the mustached representative of the Southshire Insurance Company. He would have given much for a legitimate excuse to seize the handlebars of that battle-scarred sleuth, one in each hand, and haul heftily on them; and he was malevolently deliberating whether such a maneuver could be justified in the emergency when the interruption came.

It was provided by Peter Quentin, who stood at another window of the hotel vertically above the Prince's suite, dangling a curious egg-shaped object at the end of a length of cotton. When it hung just an inch above Schamyl's window, he took up a yard of slack and swung the egg-shaped object cautiously outwards. As it started to swing back, he dropped the slack, and the egg plunged through the Prince's open window and broke the cotton in the jerk that ended its trajectory.

Chief Inspector Teal did not know this. He only heard the crash behind him, and swung round to see a pool of milky fluid spreading around a scattering of broken glass on the floor. Without stopping to think he made a dive towards it, and a gush of dense black smoke burst from the milky pool like a flame and struck him full in the face.

He choked and gasped, and groped around in a moment of utter blindness. In another instant the whole room was filled with the jet-black fog. The shouts and stumblings of the other men in the room came to him as if through a film of cotton-wool as he lumbered sightlessly towards the table where the crown had stood. He cannoned into it and ran over its surface with frantic hands. The box was not standing there any longer. In a sudden panic of fear he dropped to his knees and began to feel all over the floor around the table . . .

He had already made sure that the box had not been knocked over on to the floor in the confusion, when the smoke in his lungs forced him to stagger coughing and retching to the door. The corridor outside was black with the same smoke, and in the distance he could hear the tinkling of fire alarms. A man collided with him in the blackness, and Teal grabbed him in a vicious grip.

"Tell me your name," he snarled.

"Mason, sir," came the reply; and Teal recognized the voice of

the detective he had posted in the corridor.

His chest heaved painfully.

"What happened?"

"I don't know, sir. The door —opened from the inside—one of those damn smoke-bombs thrown out—started all this. Couldn't see—any more, sir."

"Let's get some air," gasped Teal.

They reeled along the corridor for what seemed to be miles before the smoke thinned out, and after a while they reached a haven where an open corridor window reduced it to no more than a thin gray mist. Red-eyed and panting, they stared at one another.

"He's done it," said Teal huskily.

That was the bitter fact he had to face; and he knew without further investigation, even without the futile routine search that had to follow, that he would never see the crown of Cherkessia again.

The other members of the party were blundering down towards them through the fog. The first figure to loom up was that of Prince Schamyl himself, cursing fluently in an incomprehensible tongue; and after him came the form of the Southshire Insurance Company's private bloodhound.

Teal's bloodshot eyes glared at that second apparition insanely through the murk. Mr. Teal had suffered much; he was not feeling himself, and in the last analysis he was only human. That is the only explanation this chronicle can offer for what he did. For with a kind of strangled grunt, Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal lurched forward and took hold of the offensive handlebar mustaches, one in each determined hand.

"Perhaps now you'll tell me how you did it," said Patricia Holm.

The Saint smiled. He had arrived only twenty minutes before, fresh as a daisy, at the hotel in Paris where he had arranged to meet her; and he was unpacking.

From a large suitcase he had taken a small folding table, which was a remarkable thing for him to have even in his frequently eccentric luggage. He set it up before her, and placed on it a velvet-lined wooden box. The table was somewhat thicker in the top than most tables of that size, as if it might have contained a drawer; but she could not see any drawer.

"Watch," he said.

He touched a concealed spring somewhere in the side of the table—and the box vanished. Because she was watching it closely, she saw it go. It simply fell through the trapdoor into the hollow thickness of the top, and a perfectly fitted panel sprang up to fill the gap again. But it

was all done in a split second; and even when she examined the top of the table closely it was hard to see the edges of the trap-door. She shook the table, but nothing rattled. For all that any ordinary examination could reveal, the top might have been a solid block of mahogany.

"It was just as easy as that," said the Saint, with the air of a conjuror revealing a treasured illusion. "The crown never even left the room until I was ready to take it away. Fortunately the Prince hadn't actually paid for the crown. It was still insured by Vazey's themselves, so the Southshire Insurance Company's check will go direct to them—which saves me a certain amount of extra work. All I've got to do now is to finish off my alibi, and the job's done."

"But Simon," pleaded the girl, "when Teal grabbed your mustaches—"

"Teal didn't grab my mustaches," said the Saint with dignity. "Claud Eustace would never have dreamed of doing such a thing. I shall never forget the look on that bird's face when the mustaches were grabbed, though. It was a sight I hope to treasure to my dying day, no matter how long postponed."

He had unpacked more of the contents of his large bag while he was talking; and at that moment he was laying out on the bed a pair of imperially curled mustachios with which was connected an impressively pointed black beard. Patricia's eyes suddenly opened wide.

"Good Lord!" she gasped. "You don't mean to say you kidnapped the Prince and pretended to be *him*?"

Simon Templar shook his head.

"I always was the Prince of Cherkessia—didn't you know?" he said innocently; and all at once Patricia began to laugh.

nine's my lucky number

by . . . Ferdinand Reyher

A man who is lucky in numbers should make an excellent police officer—in any kind of weather.

NINE. He was born on the eighth of January, the first month: 8 and 1—9. He got his first job on the 9th. He left home for the first time on the 9th. He was married on the 9th, which was an occasion for rejoicing. His wife departed from him on the 9th, which was another occasion for rejoicing.

Practically everything of significance which had ever happened to him had happened on, with or through the aid of 9. When the 9 did not appear alone, neat and intact, he would manipulate days, months, years and the zodiac so as to bring the numbers to a point where he could discern his guiding figure as the dominant influence in the occurrence that immediately concerned him.

For example, he was made cashier of the bank on the 14th of March, the third month. At first sight, a 14 and 3 seem to preclude the occult presence of a 9. But not for a moment did the problem bother him. He was 46 years old when this event took place. So he simply added 46 to 14 and 3 and, behold, it made 63! Any way you added them it came to 9. No devotee of stud

Despite its brevity, this little mystery has a delightfully ironic lilt to it—the kind of lilt we've often failed to find in many a full-length crime novel. We predict you'll chuckle over its unlucky protagonist as heartily as we did.

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poker attached his destiny to Snake Mary as he to any 9.

He worked a deal of sense along with a great deal of nonsense into this obsession. He was a man of choleric rages, and as a child had been subject to fits and seizures of temper. As he grew older he learned to control himself in critical moments with nine deep breaths. He chewed his food nine times. On important occasions he counted nine before replying. He would take nine hours or nine days or even nine weeks before committing himself to a grave decision.

So after working for nine months on an airtight plan to rob the bank, he inaugurated the scheme when he was 54 years of age. Nine, observe—and withdrew the first bonds—nine of them—on the ninth of September, the ninth month.

It was simplicity itself. Old Mrs. Ferguson and John Harden alone supplied him with practically all the substitute collateral he required. As a man who attached his destiny to a thing as staple and exact as a single figure, he could have nothing but contempt for the carelessness with which even the best bank was run and the strictest bank examination made.

He extracted the last bond from its sleeping place on the following 9th of June, but he bided his time and let nine more weeks pass before he was ready to carry out his disappearance. That was simplicity itself, also. He had merely to cross the State bridge over the Balleston River, drive to Mercer, make himself known there and, returning by the back road, miss the upper plank bridge and drive into the river.

The automobile would be found, but bodies were never found there. No one even seriously looked for them. They were swept almost immediately by a boiling flood out to the unplumbed sea. Then he would change his clothes, walk into Harland and take the 11:15 express for Canada. Every bond which he carried in his bag was as negotiable as currency in Montreal. He had one Canadian passport which he would use for identification. But he would sail to Europe on still another one.

He left his house at nine o'clock in the evening. There was still a remnant of dusk in the air. He deliberately pulled up beside Dave Slade on Elm Street and conversed with him until he felt sure Dave would remember where he had said he was going and what he was wearing. He had never felt less nervous or more sure of himself. Then he swung into the State road two minutes later and headed north.

The presence of the bonds in the luggage space behind him was not in the least oppressive, but he drove with unusual car-

tion nevertheless. Oddly enough, for all of his native caution in other matters, he was usually more of a reckless than a careful driver. But tonight he drove cautiously. He could take no chances now that he was actually embarked on his getaway. If anything happened, and the bonds were discovered in the car, he might just as well prepare himself for a sojourn in jail instead of a holiday in Europe.

A bank cashier riding around at nine o'clock at night with $90,000 worth of paper which was presumably resting safe against moths and corruption in the innermost vaults of a highly protected institution would have attracted fatal attention, to say the least. So he drove carefully, slowly.

There was virtually no traffic on the road, however, and not a car passed him until he was within a quarter-mile of the bridge. Then a roadster with rumble seat occupied swept past him. A moment later, a large car roared past, followed by a sedan. He rounded the curve over the crest of the rise from which the road slanted to the bridgehead, and saw the three cars speed across with their bouncing headlight beams flashing blithely through the cable webbing.

He moved down, the incline to the bridge, gently holding back with his brakes. He swung on the bridge, and had scarcely gone twenty yards when a man, swinging a red light and carrying a shotgun, stepped directly in front of him.

He jammed on his brakes and stopped dead, almost before he realized that he had stopped. Then he would have given anything in the world not to have stopped. Only, on second thought, as he glanced wildly to one side and saw two other men standing behind one of the bridge pillars, armed with shotguns also, did he realize that even if he hadn't stopped, he would have been stopped.

The man with the red light approached him. A star twinkled on his chest. A wisp of white hair on a knobby little chin wriggled a grotesque accompaniment to a rolling cud of tobacco. He laid his elbow on the window ledge of the car and spat. To save his life the cashier couldn't have spoken a word just then. He was devastated by a gigantic, hollow wonder, as though in the presence of Fate itself.

"Git out," said the man. "I'm going to search your car."

"What—what do you mean you are going to search my car?" he managed to gasp. "What are you after?"

"I know what I'm after," said the old man. "Git out."

It wasn't the words he obeyed. It was the cantankerous dogmatism of the tone—and the three

shotguns. The old man lifted the cushion on which he had been sitting, felt around in the space it had covered, restored it, and stepped down from the running board and moved to the rear. The cashier had locked the compartment there and now he broke out in shrill protestation of terror, demanding what he was being searched for.

The little old man ignored him with the grim satisfaction of a starved authority that knew its rights, and took the ignition key out of the dashboard. It was attached to a book of keys, among which was the key of the storage compartment.

In a frenzy of despair and fury the cashier lunged at the old man. The other two gripped him. The old man regarded him with little baleful eyes. The cashier brought out his pocketbook and produced his card.

"Look at that! Read it!" he shouted hysterically. "You'll see who I am."

The old man read it. "Hm. Cashier, eh?" he said, and spat again. He retraced his steps to the rear of the car, unlocked it and threw it open.

First he pulled out and opened the bundle which contained the clothes and spectacles with which the cashier had intended to re-dress and disguise himself. Then he pulled out the traveling bag. The cashier hadn't locked it. The old man opened it and peered inside by the aid of his lantern. He cocked his head like a bird sighting a worm and brought the bag around in front of the car to the headlights.

"My God, man!" burst from the cashier. "Tell me what you are looking for?"

The old man crouched over the bag. He put his hand in the bag. "Well," he said, drawing out a fistful of bonds. "I'm looking for cornborers."

"Cornborers!" screamed the cashier.

"Yeah," said the old man. "It's against the law to bring corn into this State."

"Cornborers!" wailed the cashier in crazed indignation. "In the name of God what makes you look for cornborers with a shotgun?"

The old man drew out another fistful of bonds. He spat.

"Well," he said, almost friendly. "I'll tell you. It's surprising the things people carry with them, and almost equally surprising the fuss some of them put up over being stopped. I've been shot at so often that the other day I made up my mind that if hereafter any shooting was going to be done I was the one that was going to do it. What's more," he added primly, "the law's behind me."

He gave his cud a quick little roll, spat again, and pulled two thin black books out of the bag and opened them.

"Yes," he said slowly, staring at the cashier's Canadian passports and the photographs which adorned them. "Yes," he repeated slowly, "it's against the law to bring foreign corn into this State. And ignorance of the law is no excuse."

He looked from the passports to the cashier. He stared at him thoughtfully. The cashier stared back frozen, as rigid as though he were having his picture taken. The old man dropped his eyes on the passports again. One was adorned with a photograph of the cashier in a shaggy mustache and shell-rimmed spectacles. The other showed him a dapper gentleman in waxed mustache and trimmed Van Dyke. The cashier stared fascinated at the old man looking at those photographs, and he felt as though he were being stared at, naked.

"Well," said the old man after a long pause, "this is certainly interesting. Cashier, eh? Boys, just grab his arms. No need to be rough with him."

It wasn't they, however, who gripped him and filled him with the hopelessness of inevitability. It was Fate itself.

The old man stuffed bonds and passports into the bag and put it into the car. He drew out an ancient pair of handcuffs and approached the cashier. But the cashier held back.

"Cornborers!" he shrieked hysterically. "Cornborers! What made you pick on me? I saw three cars sweep across the bridge right ahead of me and never stop. Why didn't you stop them?"

"Why," said the old man, surprised, "you can't stop every car, can you?"

"But what made you stop me?"

"You, why you was the ninth, wasn't you?"

"Ninth—ninth?" the cashier echoed weakly, swaying as though the whole solidity of his universe were crumbling beneath his feet. "What made you pick on nine?"

"What made me pick on nine?" said the old man, taking his hands and gently slipping the handcuffs over his wrists. "Why, nine's my lucky number. What's yours?"

It was whispered that the Reverend Janssen had no heart at all. But such rumors were quickly dispelled when he cheated the gallows by a heart attack! He cheated his parishioners, too, in a manner most abhorrent in a gentleman of the cloth. Arson was perhaps the least of his crimes, and— But you'll have ample opportunity to plumb the depths of the parson's villainy in Leslie Charteris' superb true crime story, THAT'S ARSON, PARSON, *in our next issue*

the light at three o'clock

by MacKinlay Kantor

In the chill, small hours preceding dawn a switchboard operator gets many unusual calls. But Shultz hardly expected *Red* for *Murder.*

ABOVE THE switchboard a little clock ticked fitfully away. There was a certain hesitation in its chatter, as if after each catch of minute cogs it was waiting for something to happen.

It seemed to possess advance information on something relentless and implacable, and much more portentous than the heavy rain outside. Its little white hands registered 2:53. The clock was the only active mechanism, apparently, in all that room. Below it the black surface of the switchboard dozed, unbroken by any gleam of bulbs.

Soon, of course, the bulbs would gleam. A woman would need a doctor for her baby. A man would call up a woman who preferred after-midnight dates. A long-distance call would come in from Milwaukee. People somewhere in the Allan Court would be leaving, even at this hour of the night, and even in this cold rain.

Unlike the clock, Eddie Shultz wasn't functioning. Shultz had

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When MacKinlay Kantor isn't writing Western stories with scrupulous fidelity to a vanished epoch's adventurous splendors, or corresponding with historians about his magnificent new ANDERSONVILLE, *or hearkening again to* THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN, *a novel which thrilled millions, he is quite capable of turning out an unsurpassable piece of detection. Which is just another way of saying that Mr. Kantor's versatility is amazing and that with every new book his stature has grown. And here is a Kantor mystery short-story that's sure to delight you.*

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fallen asleep, leaning back in his chair, the metal band of the head-phone gleaming tightly across his youthful brow.

Shultz was very young and romantic, and just at this moment he was dreaming of a red-haired waitress with warmth and friendliness in her eyes, and a tantalizing sway to her hips. The job being what it was—night switchboard operator in a large Sheridan Road apartment hotel—Shultz did not receive any enormous salary. But he could sleep—and he could dream.

Suddenly, one red circle exploded amidst the waiting rows of flat bulbs. The buzzer sounded, long and insistently . . . Still the operator slept, stubbornly refusing to turn away from the romance in his dream. The buzzing sound grew louder in its insistency. The office seemed to be alive with it, and its exasperation was almost tangible.

Eddie Shultz came back to the Allan Court with a sudden start. He blinked, jerking forward, and pawed hurriedly at a switch. His groping hand found a plug; rammed it in. The red circle winked into blackness.

"Office."

The board waited blankly. Above, the clock chattered on its ceaseless round.

"Office," said Mr. Shultz.

No answer. Then—it might have been his imagination—there was the sound of a receiver going back on its hook. The red bulb glowed instantly. Very much annoyed, Eddie withdrew the plug, and swore softly to himself.

Then with a quick tightening of his muscles, he bent forward and looked searchingly at the offending light and its accompanying hole. He could hear his own breath, alarmingly close and alarmingly loud. And he could feel an uncomfortable and cool irritation all up and down the back of his neck.

God! he thought. *That was Twenty-two! Hold on—wait. Probably it was Twenty. Yes, it must have been Twenty.* He leaned back and sighed with relief.

Again—the buzzing sound. Again—the little red bulb was gleaming. And this time there was no mistaking the location. The typewritten numerals in the slot beneath were all too plainly visible—twenty-two, they said.

It could hardly be denied that Eddie Shultz would have preferred to remain right where he was—secure and immobile in his chair. But there was that red glow, that waiting connection, and there was the sound of the buzzer.

With one quick lunge he stuffed in the plug and tore open the switch. The bulb winked out, quickly and alarmingly. Shultz found his voice. He said very distinctly: "Office!"

Through the head-phone clamped to his ear there came a

sound which filled him with sudden horror. It was the sound of some unseen person swallowing. Then the switch clicked, and the red glare of the uncompleted connection danced before his eyes.

He drew out the plug and rose slowly to his feet, his eyes riveted on the calm row of electric bulbs. His dry lips shaped the whispered words. "Twenty-two. I won't let myself believe it. Twenty-two. Oh, God—

A moaning gust of wind swept around the corner past the basement window. The dark rain sprayed against the pane as if flung from some gigantic ghostly hand, guided by malice. There wasn't any traffic out in the street, not even the welcome sound of one lone car. The neighborhood was dead. The whole world was black and wet and dead. And in Apartment Twenty-two—

The hands of the clock stood at two fifty-eight. He had spent a most frightening five minutes. The job wasn't worth what he had to go through.

Eddie sighed, and sat down very slowly. He had to stay. His self-respect demanded it. Hell, he oughtn't to be so nervous. There wasn't any such thing as a ghost. Any fool would know that. When people were dead, they were done for. Even on a black night in that great U-shaped building, with the rain sweeping down in sheets—

Again the buzzer sounded. He shrieked in his mind: "I won't look! By God, I don't *have* to look. It just isn't so! That place is—" But his eyes twisted in their sockets, drawn back to the bulb by a hideous fascination. There, in the middle row, the little flat lamp was still registering its rosy gleam.

Eddie's lips were twitching now. He faltered, nerving himself for one final try. It wouldn't be hard. The switch was right there, and he had only to insert the plug— There! The light was gone. It had been easy. Why had he let himself believe—

And then that same ghastly whisper came to him, seemingly nearer than before. For a moment he couldn't speak or move. Then he heard himself screaming, "Office! Answer—Office!"

The switch closed, and the light winked again, and—

Eddie had had enough. He leaped up, ripping off the head-clamp and flinging it down. He plunged across the shadowy little office and threw open the front door. The rain poured down at him in a black, blinding spray. He turned up the collar of his coat, and then—he faltered. He couldn't go out. He just didn't have the nerve to run around the corner and down through the court in that rain. It was too much to expect of him. He didn't have the courage—and he didn't care who knew it.

His eyes were wide and staring as he groped his way back to the switchboard. Hurriedly he thrust a plug into the hole marked "4" and opened a switch. His fingers pushed painfully on the red lever. *Ring*. He must ring. This was too much for anybody in the world to bear alone.

Eddie lifted the head-phone. A startled sleepy voice said: "Hello, there. Hello. Hello—"

"Mr. Edwards."

"Well?"

"This is Eddie Shultz—" He hesitated for a moment, his heart pounding tumultuously.

"Well, what is it?"

And then the barriers were swept down in one fearful flood. "My God, Mr. Edwards, I'm quitting! I tell you I'm quitting! I don't want this job. It ain't right for me to go through this. Mr. Edwards, you've got to come down here right away. If you don't come I'll beat it and leave the board. I'll go home. No, I'm not crazy. Listen here: you come down . . . It's Apartment Twenty-two! There's something up there. Three times it's rung in here, and each time it hangs up when I answer. But it sort of chokes and swallows first!

"It's the truth, I tell you! Yes, I know there ain't supposed to be any person up there. I know, I know. Mr. Duncan's dead, too. But it was just about this time last night that he got killed. Mr. Edwards—*that light's on again!*"

Hatless, with his topcoat and trousers drawn loosely over his pajamas, Matt Edwards stood in the office and scowled at the pale and twitching Shultz.

"Now, what's all this damn' foolishness about?"

"Nothing, Mr. Edwards. I mean— Well, the light. It keeps coming on. And you know—"

The manager—slim and debonair despite his strange attire—went over to the switchboard and bent to examine the rows of bulbs. "It isn't on now."

"No, it stopped registering just before you came. But wait. It'll come on again."

"Who's this talking right now? Forty-five hooked up with outside? And Thirty-eight hooked up with Seven?" Quickly he opened first one switch, then another. A man's voice said calmly: "Well, heat a little water and give it to her in a teaspoon if she won't take her bottle."

Almost immediately a woman said vengefully: "If you go out to any more poker games this week don't expect to find me here. All right, stay there and lose—"

Edwards made a wry face and clicked the switches. He turned to Shultz. "Nothing there. You're —you're *sure* you weren't mistaken?"

"I ought to know one light from another," protested Shultz.

Edwards frowned, tapping his hand on the back of a chair.

"Look here. The apartment was locked tightly inside—every door and window—when we broke in there with the police last night. I mean, at three o'clock yesterday morning. Duncan's key was on the inside of the front door, and we had to break it open. I had a new lock put on the door afterward. I've got the only key in my pocket. The back door is bolted and has the safety chain on. How could anybody—"

"I tell you it registered, Mr. Edwards," Eddie broke in. "The light was on. Four different times it came on and buzzed."

The silence was broken only by the splash of water outside—a hollow, lonely drip that somehow reminded Shultz of water seeping out of an old burial vault. In spite of himself. Edwards strove desperately to keep from shuddering.

"We'll sit down here, and watch that board," he said. "I don't want to doubt your word, Shultz. If that light comes on again, and I see it with my own eyes we'll go up to the apartment."

Shultz huddled on a bench by the inner door. Edwards sat down in the chair by the switchboard, and lit a cigarette. His brow creased painfully as he reviewed the events of the preceding twenty-four hours, trying to arrive at some explanation.

Duncan, the tenant in Apartment Twenty-two, had lived at the Allan Court for three years. He had been a man of evident wealth and refinement, though something of a recluse. He belonged to no clubs and attended few theaters. He drove an imported roadster. Few people ever called at his apartment and all of his tastes seemed ordinary, not to say conventional.

He was an ardent collector of old flasks and glassware, and was said to be an authority on early American glass. The management had permitted him, at his own expense, to install many cupboards and cabinets for the housing of his treasures. Tall, gray-haired and slender, he was the perfect picture of a sedate gentleman.

Some time before three o'clock on the previous morning, adjacent tenants had been aroused by a shot. The sound seemed to come from Mr. Duncan's apartment. The building was old, although it had been remodeled and modernized, and the thick walls prevented voices in one apartmeent from being heard in another. A few minutes later the woman in the flat above heard an automobile drive down the alley.

The manager was notified. When repeated calls to Apartment Twenty-two failed to elicit any response, Edwards summoned the police. The door of the apartment was locked, with Duncan's key inside, and it was impossible to use a pass-key. The

police forced the door, and entered the rooms. There was, at first glance, no trace of Duncan. Though every closet and cubbyhole in the place had been ransacked, the tenant could not be found.

Every window was solidly fastened. The lights were burning and the back door was locked, with its inner safety-chain in place. The unused kitchen—Duncan took his meals in restaurants—offered no clew. Only the living room bore gruesome testimony that a deadly struggle had taken place. There was a bullet hole in the wall, and Sergeant Sherris dug out a .45 caliber slug. There were fresh bloodstains on two of the rugs—and one splotch of yellowish-white, sickening and unmistakable.

So Duncan was dead—he had been murdered. But where was his body? And what was the motive? The priceless collection of Stiegel glass and curios was untouched and there were diamond studs and platinum cuff-links on the dresser in the bedroom.

A terrified janitor had come hammering at the door. He had been attending to boiler fires in the building next door, and his attention had been drawn to a minor disturbance in the alley outside. Now he saw several men hoisting the inert body of another man into a big sedan.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"Sick man," said one of them ominously. "Get back inside that door, and get back quick!"

The janitor had fled, and they had driven away. No, he hadn't seen the license number—he was too frightened. No, he didn't know how many men there were. Maybe three or four . . .

So Duncan had been murdered, and his body taken away in that unidentified car. But how did the murderers leave the apartment—with every door and every window locked on the inside?

Sergeant Sherris nodded and looked wise. Every so often, for the past few years, some prominent or wealthy man had been kidnapped. Sometimes they got back alive—blindfolded and unable to supply any information. Sometimes they didn't come back at all. The money hadn't been sent as directed. There had been Page, the lumber king. And Rosenblam, the hotel man. And Justessen, that rich Dane visiting at the Drake Hotel. All kidnapped by extortionists . . . It was possible that the same gang had come after Duncan. He had resisted—and had been shot. They had taken his body out of the apartment. But—how? And why?

Edwards twisted uncomfortably in his chair. There could be no denying it. That was where the spooks came in. At least, it was a mystery. And now, this strange call, this alleged lighting

up of apartment twenty-two's switchboard lamp, when nobody was in the place, and when he had the only key to the new lock.

"Look there!" cried Shultz. "See it? *The light's on again!*"

The rain tore clammily at them as they hurried down the court, as if unseen hands, ghastly and intent, were bent on holding them back from the dark rooms on the floor above. Edwards lifted his eyes as they passed the last concrete flowerbed. The windows of Twenty-two were blank and ominous.

"Come on," he said brusquely, as Shultz halted irresolutely at the vestibule door.

Eddie Shultz turned a greenish face to him. "By God, Mr. Edwards, I don't want to go."

"Neither do I," growled the manager. "We're both going."

Their steps shuddered softly on the carpeted stairway. It was impossible to believe that the opposite door of that first landing opened on an ordinary apartment occupied by ordinary people—a man, his wife, and their two daughters. Apartment Twenty-one. There were human beings there. But across the hall, in Twenty-two—

Edwards fumbled in his pocket for the key. The new lock gleamed ominously on the damaged door; its very brightness an affront.

Shultz whispered, "You got a —— gun?"

"No, I haven't." Edwards had a spinning, helpless sensation. "But, listen here. There's nothing to hurt us. Nothing—"

The door creaked as it turned on its hinges.

Edwards felt along the wall for the light switch. The pressure of his finger flooded the hall with yellow light. In startled apprehension the eyes of both men turned toward the telephone stand. There was no one beside it, or anywhere else within sight.

The carved walnut telephone stand was of the cabinet type, narrow and high. A small stool had been placed beside it. One door of the cabinet swung partly ajar.

Slowly, Edwards walked toward the telephone. It seemed as if years passed before he reached it, and looked inside, and saw the instrument reposing in the shadows. He lifted the bracket and the connection clicked. Yes, the instrument was in working order. But—"

"Nobody here," said Shultz, in a barely audible whisper.

"We'll turn on the lights," the manager said.

They advanced into the living-room, the dining room, the bedrooms. Fearfully, they peered under the beds and opened closet doors. Nothing.

In the kitchen they stared at the outer door, which was locked and bolted, its heavy safety-chain snugly in place. Still nobody. No-

body in the pantry—a vacant apartment—a ghoulish, threatening place with locked windows, locked doors—and still the thought of something inside.

Once more they toured the rooms, turning on the lights with prodigal haste. The dining room and one bedroom had been refurnished by Duncan to serve as galleries for his rare collections. Electricity gleamed softly on rows of dark flasks, and blown glass vases. There were tall cupboards along the walls, each containing an array of glistening treasure.

Nothing had been disturbed. Only that ragged hole in the plaster, and the dark stains on the rugs, remained as grim reminders that stark tragedy had struck. The police had told Edwards to leave everything just as it was. Edwards and Shultz made a last examination. They poked beneath the davenports, and peered into the hamper in the bedroom. The search had been utterly fruitless.

They retreated into the hallway, and the manager once again opened the telephone cabinet and lifted the instrument. No, his ears had not deceived him. He could still hear the click. The telephone was in working order.

"We certainly haven't found anything," he said to Shultz. He tried to laugh, and the sound was eerie and startling in those deserted rooms. "I'm afraid it was just—just something the matter with the switchboard. We might as well go." He reached into his pocket for the key, and brought it out—a shining fragment of metal.

"Mr. Edwards!" The voice of Shultz was deadened with a cold, listless horror. "Look at your hand! You've got blood—all over your hand!"

For a full ten seconds Edwards stared down at those telltale marks on his right hand. It seemed to him that he could hear his own heart, thundering in that oppressive silence. Outside, the rain came down, blackly, dripping on damp ledges.

Then Edwards straightened. There was a tense, quick tightening of his mouth.

"Turn off the rest of those lights," he said. His voice was unnecessarily loud. He waited in the open door, wiping his hand on a handkerchief. Shultz leaped back out of the parlor, his lips trembling. "Let's get out of here," said Edwards, "for good."

At the doorway, with his finger on the light switch, he motioned for the operator to go ahead of him. Then, with a lightning gesture, he had pressed the key into Shultz's hand.

His voice was a hard whisper: "There's something here. I'm going to stay. You turn out that light and slam the door. I'll hide here in the corner. If the light shows on the board again, you call the police and come back up

here, and come in! I don't know where it's hidden. I don't even know what it is. But that blood on my hand came off the telephone! Something's here. Now, beat it! "

The electric switch snapped out the one remaining light. Darkness came sweeping down and the door slammed shut.

Quietly, Edwards tiptoed across the hall and slipped into a corner opposite the telephone cabinet. He crouched down in the heavy darkness, scarcely daring to breathe.

The minutes passed like heavy bats, circling low, unwilling to alight.

It seemed an hour before Edwards heard the downstairs door close, and knew that Shultz was in the court, hurrying toward the office. The constant fury of rain had somewhat abated. The water still came down outside, but in an intermittent dribble. Far away, the siren of a fire truck screeched with a horrid earnestness, but in the apartment there was only a dead silence as if unguessed monsters were ominously biding their time, and might at any moment spring out.

He was crouched on the further corner of the hall, opposite the outside door, and between the opening to the bedroom and the wider doorway which gave on the living room. No person—no *thing*—could come from any direction without his seeing it. Lights from the alley and from the court shone in, faintly and bitterly, yet strong enough for Edwards to discern the outlines of the furniture.

His mind returned to the telephone. The first time he held it up, he had not placed his hand on the base of the instrument. The second time, he had done so. And immediately afterward Shultz had pointed to his hand and cried out his awful news.

Far away, in one of the other rooms, a sound broke the stillness. It was unmistakable—the creak of wood, of an opening door. Edwards waited, swallowing fearfully. Something had moved! He was not alone!

Once again he heard the creaking. It was followed by the tinkle of glass and a sound of footsteps, creeping slowly and heavily.

It was coming. It was moving nearer, out of the dining-room and into the living-room. Its body thudded softly against some obstructing piece of furniture. There was a frightening sound, half human and half animal, a muffled cough and growl. Edwards shrank closer against the wall. His fists were clenched so tightly that the nails cut into his palms.

Nearer it came, and nearer. It moved between him and the court window—a thin shape like a clothed skeleton. Yes, it was coming to the telephone again. It couldn't stay away. It had a call

to make, obviously. It was in the doorway now, black and gruesome, an arm's length away.

Edwards heard the choking sound again, and a spasm of strained breathing. The door of the telephone cabinet banged open. There was a faint click and sputter—the sound of a lifting receiver—

Edwards darted forward. His groping hands encountered flesh, cold and moist. He was grappling with the thing, and had it in his arms. But the creature, ghost, or murderer, made no sound, offered no resistance. Quite suddenly and hideously it had collapsed against him there in the close blackness.

Edwards struggled out into the living-room, half-dragging his terrible burden. And the light from the court shone on the white skin and staring eyes of Duncan, the man who had been murdered.

With a scream, Edwards leaped back. There was the heavy thud of a falling body. The manager felt his own hands fumbling along the wall for a switch. And, then, mercifully, his fingers encountered metal. He pressed down hard—and the room became flooded with light.

Duncan lay before him on the floor, pajama-clad and with stained towels, ghastly and encrusted, tightly wound around his neck.

Trembling, Edwards dropped down and lifted the man in his arms. Duncan's eyes were staring, and his lips moved soundlessly.

"What was it?" Edwards gasped. "What happened?"

The head of the injured man moved slowly. His eyes seemed seeking beyond the hotel manager, searching for something in the room behind him. The other man turned. On the telephone table lay a small bronze-covered notebook and an ornate pencil. He seized them and lifted Duncan to the couch, pressing the book and pencil into his hands. On a side table was a decanter of whiskey. He forced a few drops between Duncan's blue lips.

"Write it," he said. "Write it, if you can. You're going to—"

Falteringly, the pencil slid over the notebook in a weak scrawl:

> They came in the back way as always. LeCron started arguing about his split. We had trouble. Baletto cut me with knife but I shot him. They took LeCron away in a car and I was afraid—

Edwards tore off the sheet of paper. The pencil still moved, its words barely legible:

> I knew police would come hearing shot, so I hid in my place. Lost a good deal of blood and tonight thought I would give up and send for police and doctor. Tried telephone but could not talk and lost my nerve.

When you came I hid again. Thought I might get out alive and get away but it started to bleed again and I came out to phone.

The pencil wavered and dropped from Duncan's stiffening fingers. His head lolled back, jerked once horribly. There was a choking sob. Then his body went limp and his eyes stared glassily upward.

Outside, feet trampled in the hall, and the door shook under the impact of determined blows.

"WHAT I don't see," said Shultz, "is where he was hid."

The sergeant straightened up. "We can find that out in a minute. It's amazing he lived as long as he did. His throat was almost cut in two."

"If you want to look now," Edwards said, "I think we can get to the bottom of this thing. When he came out I heard glass tinkling."

They covered the body with a scarf, and Edwards led the way into the refurnished dining-room, Shultz and the officers pressing close behind him.

The manager bent down and inspected the cabinets of glassware with great care. On the bottom shelf of the last cabinet, he found an irregular red circle.

"This must be it," he said, grimly.

It took them some time to ascertain the combination. At length Edwards fumbled with an old flask which seemed cemented on the shelf. Glassware and all, the big bureau began to turn slowly in its place, disclosing a narrow closet behind the shelves. In that narrow compartment were a few cushions, an automatic pistol, a leather briefcase stuffed with papers, and bloodstains which showed all too well how Duncan had weakened and suffered during the hours he had remained in hiding.

The red-faced detective sergeant needed only a few minutes' perusal of the papers in the briefcase to tell him what he wanted to know. "I was partly right and partly wrong," he said. "He must have made that cubbyhole when he installed the cabinets, figuring he would need a hideaway for this stuff—and maybe for himself. We can get the rest of the gang from the names in his dying confession, Mr. Edwards. But I was wrong in one respect. I thought he had been murdered by that kidnapping ring which has been raising so much hell for three years. I thought he was their victim, when all the time he was the brains of the mob. Look at these papers and clippings."

Shultz heaved a vast sigh, and turned to his employer. "Just the same, I think I'll quit my job, Mr. Edwards. I'd go nuts if I was on the board tonight and another call came in from Apartment Twenty-two."

the sequel to murder

by . . . Anthony Gilbert

The hands of a shattered clock or a newspaper dateline may send a man to the gallows. But there's a deadlier way of making sure.

I COMMITTED the folly of spending my holidays last year with a cousin at a place called Farmers' Green, and while I was there an old woman named Mrs. Masters was found dead in her cottage.

It was a tumble-down affair, a relic of the Middle Ages apparently, and Mrs. Masters suited it to perfection. She and her husband had been evacuated to Farmers' Green from Bermondsey in 1940, and he'd died the following year. There had been a son, but he came to grief early —a little matter of making off with his employer's office cash. He got four years and died in prison before he could serve out his term. Mrs. Masters was not in the habit of talking about him.

The old woman's only living relative, as far as anyone knew, was a nephew, a salesman for a firm of chemists whose business brought him to the neighborhood once a week. Every Friday he called at the cottage and the old witch gave him a cup of tea. According to local gossip she lived entirely on biscuits and cheese

Not so long ago, in these very pages, the Saint turned tradition topsy turvy by introducing us to a playboy nephew who had been supporting his mysteriously murdered uncle. Now Anthony Gilbert, one of England's most popular mystery novelists, brings us another tradition-shattering crime departure in circumstances quite as extraordinary. The killer's identity will truly astound you.

and tea that she made syrupy with sugar.

Local opinion was divided about the nephew—Brewer was his name—some saying that the old woman was a miser and that he was buying his inheritance by installments, and others that he probably had to contribute to her support, though to judge by her penurious way of living she could hardly have spent her pension every week.

"A lot of people think she's a witch as well as a miser," my cousin told me. "She never speaks to a soul, and hasn't received a letter in five years. What is even more incredible, she never takes a newspaper, hasn't even got a radio. About once a month she comes out of the cottage carrying a brown-paper parcel and takes the bus into Ellerby. About two hours later she returns with another brown-paper parcel, not having exchanged a single word with her fellow passengers on the bus. She apparently never draws her pension in the village. If it wasn't for Percy we'd have no way of knowing whether she's alive or dead."

Percy was the local redhead who delivered the milk. Every day he left Mrs. Masters a pint—her sole luxury—and collected yesterday's empty bottle from the front porch. Every Friday he found a sealed envelope on top of the bottle containing payment for seven pints at five pence a pint. She hadn't spoken to him once in five years.

On that particular Friday when Percy called he said, "I can't understand it at all. For the first time since I've known her there's no bottle on the step and no money."

We were his next port of call and we could see the cottage quite clearly from the front garden. By the way, this was Friday, July the twenty-second. The date's important.

Millie said: "Oh well, this is the nephew's visiting day. Suppose we let him do the worrying." But I noticed that when the little black car drew up at the gate she was hanging about in the front garden.

As far as anyone knew no one but Brewer had ever been admitted to the house. If anyone else rang the bell Mrs. Masters would open the window and shout: "Not at home." Once she even sent the vicar away with a flea in his ear.

We watched Brewer ring the bell, but nothing happened. Millie said: "I'm going to see what it's all about," and I decided to accompany her.

We found Brewer looking a bit apprehensive, and when he saw us he called out, "Do you know if anything's wrong? I can't get any reply."

Millie said: "Why, she hasn't taken in today's milk," and it was obvious that she hadn't.

Brewer suggested going round to the back, and because he looked really agitated now Millie needed no urging. The back door was locked, but we could see through the kitchen window a tray laid out with two cups and plates. But there was no sign of anything to eat on the kitchen sideboard, or either of the two tables.

"She must be expecting you," I said.

But Millie was quick to observe that it was very odd indeed that Mrs. Masters should have set out plates and saucers, and neglected to take in the milk.

Well, the long and short of it was that we had to break down the back door, and then we no longer had to wonder why Mrs. Masters hadn't answered the bell. She was lying hunched up on a chair in the parlor, stone cold dead.

There was some knitting on the floor beside her, and the instant she saw it Millie exclaimed: "What on earth was she making baby clothes for?"

Then she looked intently at Brewer, but he shook his head and said: "No, Mrs. Brewer wasn't expecting an heir. She was delicate and the doctor had warned her not to even think of having children."

Well, Millie offered to stay while he went to summon help. After he'd gone she remarked to me that the old woman had probably died of starvation. The cottage was bleak, and wretchedly furnished. The chair wouldn't have fetched a half-crown at auction and the carpet was worn threadbare. The rest of the stuff was made out of orangeboxes, and in poor condition at that.

"She must have sold everything after the husband died," Millie said. "Well, it looks as though the stories about her being a miser did not spring solely from local gossip, malicious or otherwise."

Then Brewer came back with Dr. Carver, a muddling old gentleman who couldn't have distinguished a migraine from a fatal meningitis after four in the afternoon. He affirmed at once she'd died of heart failure, probably due to under-nourishment and old age, and made haste to add that there would be no need for a post-mortem. Brewer could go ahead with the arrangements for the funeral as soon as he pleased.

Between us we got the dead woman upstairs, and into the bedroom which was as wretched as the parlor. There weren't even any sheets on the bed.

Almost instantly the eyes of all three of us went to a japanned deed-box that stood on the floor a few feet from the bed's splintered baseboard. The nephew said his aunt had told him if she ever passed away suddenly he was to open it. She'd told him where she kept the key and he

asked if we'd stay as witnesses to what it contained.

Of course, we needed no urging. But as might have been expected the contents were a shock to us all. There was money there all right, but only a few pound notes. Accompanying them was a memorandum in the old woman's scratchy handwriting to the effect that they were the property of a Mr. Grant of London. The other papers in the box proved to be receipts, all from the same Mr. Grant.

It turned out he was the man her son had defrauded, and that all these years she'd been starving and scrimping to make good the lad's criminal indebtedness. That's why she'd sold the furniture, and the husband's insurance money had been sacrificed in the same good cause.

I happened to catch Brewer's expression when we realized this. His jaw had fallen open, and his lips were deathly white. Oh, and we got the explanation of the brown-paper parcels. There was a box full of knitted garments under the bed. It appeared she worked for a shop in Ellerby, worked day and night to judge by what she earned, and once a month she took the completed work to that retail outlet and came back with new supplies of wool. She'd almost wiped out the debt when death caught up with her.

Of course the story spread, as such stories will, and down came the reporters by bus and by train. *Mystery Widow Makes Reparations*—you know how inane such headlines can become.

Just as we were leaving I said: "I thought you told me she never read a newspaper. What's that copy of the *Evening Sun* doing in the kitchen?"

It was the issue for July the twenty-first—you remember I said the date was important—and my simple observation changed everything. Because, you see, Farmers' Green is so small it isn't on most maps, and it doesn't get its evening papers until the next day. And that delay of twenty-four hours gave us an alternative explanation for the tea-tray. Instead of being made ready for Friday's visitor, it could just as easily have been washed up after Thursday's.

Speculation ran riot. The nephew said he couldn't imagine who the visitor could have been. He would have liked to deny the unknown's existence, but there was the newspaper to prove beyond dispute that someone had been there. Unfortunately for the village there had been a fair the previous afternoon and everyone—barring Mrs. Masters—had turned out. And that meant that anyone could have come and gone unnoticed.

It's ironic to reflect that if Brewer had simply said: "I came over yesterday because I wasn't

sure I could make it today, and I came again, after all, because I thought she was seriously ill," he'd probably be alive now. But he denied it so vehemently, and at the same time was so cagey when he was asked as a matter of form where he had spent the afternoon that the police took a hand and stopped the funeral for a post-mortem.

And then the balloon went up. It appeared that Mrs. Masters hadn't died of under-nourishment or old age, but of a lethal dose of poison presumably administered in a cup of tea. The drug used was one which could only be procured by doctor's prescription—and as far as the old lady was concerned the prescription didn't exist.

Brewer was asked if he ever took drugs, and he replied heatedly that he didn't. He further declared that he didn't approve of them at all, and was always telling his wife what a dangerous habit even the taking of sleeping tablets could become. That, naturally, sent the police posthaste to his home to see Mrs. Brewer.

She was a delicate, trailing sort of woman a few years older than her husband, and she said she did take drugs occasionally. But her husband had frowned on the practice and she was co-operating.

"I haven't touched my last supply," she said proudly.

And when Inspector Crewe, who was in charge of the inquiry, asked the name of the drug you won't be surprised to hear it was the same drug that had killed Mrs. Masters. He then asked her to show him the bottle, and when she opened a drawer he managed to get hold of it before she could, grasping it carefully by the cap.

Mrs. Brewer fluttered around explaining that there was a fortnight's supply at the rate of one tablet a day. Two would be dangerous and three quite fatal.

Then Crewe sprang his mine by saying: "Look here, you must have made a mistake about not taking any of these. If you are telling the truth there should be fourteen tablets in the bottle and there are only eleven."

Well, she swore she hadn't taken any, and Crewe carried the phial away and had it tested for fingerprints. Naturally hers were on it, and—as you've no doubt by this time suspected—Brewer's were there as well.

He tried to get out of that by saying he'd removed the bottle from her one evening when she'd wanted to take a tablet, but unfortunately the allegation didn't square with her evidence. It's always advisable for husbands and wives to tell the same truth.

The evidence of the newspaper went against him, too. It was established that he always took the *Evening Sun* home, but when Crewe inquired, Mrs. Brewer couldn't find Thursday's issue anywhere about the house. She

aggrievedly affirmed she must have thrown it away if it wasn't on the paper rack. But Crewe quickly discovered that the dustbin had gone unemptied for a week, and, of course, you don't have fires in July.

Well, she asked on the verge of tears, was it so important? Most likely her husband had left it somewhere, possibly on a bus. He was so worried these days. About money—she admitted under pressure. They were in debt all over the place. She hoped he hadn't been betting on the horses—he was such an unlucky chap.

He was, indeed. It turned out that Brewer had been backing a dark horse for at least three years in Punnetts Green, and there was an illegitimate child called Johnny for whose support he was committed by law. He was behindhand with his payments there, too, and the woman—a Mrs. Castle—had written demanding the money and suggesting a visit on Thursday.

"And that's where you were?" asked Crewe.

Brewer said: "Yes." But actually he hadn't arrived until six, though the letter had established four as the time of the rendezvous. He had the usual story of a puncture, but no witnesses to support it. And when the police asked to see the letter he fumbled about in his briefcase and then gave the belated, feeble excuse that he'd destroyed it to keep it from falling into his wife's hands. Mrs. Castle backed him up, but she wasn't regarded as a very reliable witness, and the upshot of it was that Brewer was arrested for murder and subsequently found guilty.

He'd been right about one thing. When the story broke his wife changed her tune with a vengeance. You'd have thought she wanted to see him hanged. She even let out that they'd been counting on what the old woman would leave them, knowing she couldn't last much longer. She wouldn't even go to see Brewer in prison the night before he was hanged.

"She'd murder him herself if she could," said Millie. "It's enough to make you feel sorry for him, whatever he's done."

AND NOW here's the sequel. On the day following her husband's execution Daisy Brewer put the house and its contents in the hands of a local auctioneer, and on the way home she was knocked down by a bus and killed on the spot. At the subsequent auction sale I bought a rather attractive little chest she'd had in her room. I was planning to get married, and I thought Anne might like it if she didn't suspect where it came from.

I asked Millie to keep it for me, and just before the wedding I took it home and polished it up. I opened one of the drawers,

which were all paper-lined and quite hard to open, and I found a small manila envelope wedged in the back.

When I pried it loose I saw it was addressed to Brewer. Inside was the letter from Mrs. Castle that might have saved his life. After that I wasn't surprised to discover that the newspaper used for the lining was an *Evening Sun* dated July the twenty-first, 1955.

So there I was, with evidence that Mrs. Brewer had deliberately lied away her husband's life.

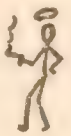
"Well—what would you have done?"

I know what I did. I took all the evidence and dumped it on the fire. What was the sense in reopening the case when they were all three dead? I suppose I'm the only man who *knows* the identity of Mrs. Masters' visitor on that fatal Thursday.

She'd planned it well, knowing Brewer would be on the other side of the county, and naturally the old woman wouldn't refuse to admit her nephew's wife. The fair being that day made it that much easier, and the sugar in the tea would disguise the taste of the tablets—if they had any.

"She'd murder him herself if she could," Millie had said.

Well—she had.



DON'T MISS THESE UNUSUAL STORIES FEATURED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE—DRAMATIC HEADLINERS ALL

THAT'S ARSON, PARSON by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IT'S AGAINST THE LAW by ERSKINE CALDWELL

THE DISAPPEARING INVESTORS by EDGAR WALLACE

THE MURDERER'S RING by WILLIAM MACHARG

LET HER KILL HERSELF by RUFUS KING

THE WOMAN ON THE TERRACE by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

and many others

the frightened millionaire

by . . . Craig Rice

The murdered sailor was a very ugly knot in a crime conspiracy that wasn't nautical. But Malone had a noose expert's acumen.

JOHN J. MALONE didn't like it. All things considered—he didn't like it at all.

Maggie had never been late for work before. Always when the little criminal lawyer arrived at his office—which might be any time, depending on where he'd been the night before—she'd be there at her desk, making excuses over the telephone for his absence.

But on this particular morning, there was no Maggie. Malone's watch told him it was twenty to ten—a fair average for his own appearance—and there was no Maggie. Nothing, in fact, to indicate that there ever had been a Maggie, or even that she might have come in and gone out again. The mail, which he kicked aside, had been shoved through the slot in the door.

Incredibly, and against all precedent, Mary Margaret O'Leary was late to work. Black-haired, blue-eyed, a judicious mixture of explosive petulance

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In all of Craig Rice's murder mysteries suspense starts building up the instant J. J. Malone lights his first cigar, and mounts steadily until it erupts in a climax that leaves no residuum to be gathered up and dispersed over a dwindling margin of terror. There is never the faintest suggestion of a dwindling in a Craig Rice crime yarn, no thinning out at the end. And that is probably why she has become one of America's most popular mystery writers. Now, with this brand new short novel, she becomes not just an occasional, but a quite frequent SAINT *contributor. We think you'll agree we've a right to feel proud.*

and almost divine patience, Maggie was alternately the bane of Malone's existence, and its mainstay. And on this particular morning he was counting on her to be the mainstay. At eleven Jake Charlotte, his best and most profitable client was coming in, and words of great pith and moment would have to be put on paper.

When a client is suing a multi-millionaire for a cool million, he doesn't want a lawyer who doesn't have a secretary.

If he could only find *Maggie!*

Nothing to worry about, he told himself firmly. Maggie would never allow anything really disastrous to happen to him. He reached for the telephone and tried to decide whether to call the police, the hospitals or the morgue.

The telephone beat him to the punch.

"Malone!" It was Maggie's voice. "I've been calling and calling—"

"Maggie," Malone asked desperately. "Are you ill?"

"No," she gasped over the wire, "No, *no,* no. I feel fine. But Malone, grab a cab and come out to my house quick. There's six dollars in the emergency fund, and the key to it is behind the Winston Dictionary on the second shelf of the bookcase in the outer office."

Right away Malone knew it was a real emergency. Never before had Maggie told him the location of the key.

"Don't get excited," the little lawyer said. "Keep calm. Don't worry about a thing. I'll be right there." Almost as an afterthought he added, "What happened?"

"Malone," Maggie said, "there's a dead sailor in Ronnie's bed." She hung up.

"I'll take care of the traffic tickets," Malone told a cab driver approximately sixty seconds later. He gave the Wrightwood Avenue address, and added, "Scoot!"

The cab moved out into the stream of traffic and quickly picked up speed. "What's the rush?" the driver growled.

"There's a dead sailor in my secretary's brother's bed, and shut up," Malone told him.

The O'Leary House didn't need a Welcome Doormat to say, "Come in." Wide, wooden, and desperately in need of paint, it was sandwiched in between massive apartment buildings—a hold-over from the lavender decade. If there had ever been a key to the front door, it had been lost a generation before. More than once Malone had parked witnesses there, and he had lost count of the times he had gorged himself on Aunt Aggie's cooking.

Malone walked up the worn wooden steps with worry in his eyes, and tension in the set of his jaw.

Maggie opened the door and said with a gasp of relief, "Praise be, you're here!"

The rest of the family was in the big, slightly shabby living room. The four O'Leary brothers —appropriately named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—were sprawled on the big, old-fashioned sofa. Ronnie sat self-consciously on a chair by himself. Katie, aged nine, reclined on her stomach on the floor, reading the *Herald-American* comics. Grandfather O'Leary sat in his wheel chair, as if ready to tell anybody at the drop of a hat about his extraordinary meeting with Big Jim Corbett in a Boston saloon. Aunt Aggie sat in her customary rocking chair with her usual bit of knitting.

The little lawyer managed an all-inclusive smile. "We can talk later," he said. "Maggie, where's the body?"

"In Ronnie's room," Maggie said in an amazingly small voice. "It's right off the kitchen. I'll show you—"

It was a dead sailor, all right.

"Anybody touched the body?" Malone asked.

She shook her head. "Malone, Ronnie works from twelve till eight. When he got home *it* was here? Or should I say, *this* was here? Or would *he* be better—"

"You shut up," Malone said, in a singularly gentle tone. "Shut up—and get out!"

A few minutes later he walked into the living room and said, "There's no identification on him. What is even more puzzling there are no visible marks of violence on his body. No bullet wounds, no stab wounds—"

Aunt Aggie looked up from her knitting with a severely disapproving frown. "Malone, *must* you use words like that? And in this house?"

"Why not?" Malone said imperturbably. "You've got a possibly murdered man in it."

He waited for the color to come back into her face. Stoical Irishwoman that she was, for a moment or two she'd been very close to shock.

He spoke quickly. "Suppose we start with the dead man. I just want to know whose friend he was, and how he got here. Somebody please talk, and let me do the worrying."

Everybody started talking at once, and Malone roared, "Hush!"

"Malone," Maggie said with pure desperation in her voice, "you'd better let me tell you. You know how it is in this house. People drift in and out. Some of them are friends of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Others know Ronnie. They come in at any hour of the day or night, raid the ice-box and spend the night. A few weeks ago I came home late—the night I helped you at the office getting out that Beeble contract—and found six ten-year-

old girls sleeping on the living room rug."

Katy lifted her head from the comic section long enough to explain: "They were all members of my club, and their folks told them they could stay. So there!"

"Quiet," Malone said.

Katy gave him a mean look, walked out to the kitchen, and came back with an apple. Sullenly she resumed her reading.

"Malone," Maggie said, "this stranger—Malone, what shall we call him?"

"Just call him the corpse," Malone advised grimly.

"All right—Mr. Corpse then. But he wasn't a corpse when he walked in here. He was walking, and talking. And he was alive—"

"Maggie," Malone said sternly, "if you become hysterical I'll get you a job in the police department. That's how mean I can be. *Calm down.*" He began to unwrap a cigar. "Now suppose we try to get the story straight."

"By virtue of age," Grandfather said, "I am the head of the house. Aggie, you be still. I was sitting right here in my chair, minding my own business and working on a crossword puzzle, when the sailor wandered in. He said he was looking for a friend."

"He found one," Malone commented dryly.

"I naturally thought he was a friend of one of my grandsons. I told him they were all out, but would be coming along presently. I told him there were four cans of beer in the icebox and to help himself."

"After one beer," Malone said, "he probably became a friend of yours too."

Mark got up—all six foot four of him—and said impatiently, "Maybe I can help. I came in a little after midnight. This sailor and Grandpop were sitting here guzzling beer—"

"*Drinking* beer," the old man interrupted, "and have more respect for your elders."

"All right, *Grandfather*. You and he were *drinking* beer, and you were telling him how you could have beaten John L. Sullivan with your bare fists if you'd had the chance."

"Save your family fights till later," Malone admonished, chewing his cigar. "Who else saw him? Alive, that is."

Matthew, Luke and John had little of importance to contribute. They had each in turn seen the sailor alive. Matthew had assumed the silent visitor was waiting for Luke, and since Grandfather O'Leary had fallen asleep in his wheelchair he had, out of concern for his comfort, put him to bed.

Luke had come in a short while later, and found the visitor sitting by the window holding an empty beer can. He'd simply said he was waiting for somebody. John's story differed from the

others in no important particular.

Everybody had assumed the reticent visitor was a friend of some other member of the family. Maggie and Katy? They'd both been asleep in bed at the time of the unfortunate man's arrival.

"I'd just like to know," Malone said vehemently, "who was the *last* person to see him alive."

"Malone," Aunt Aggie said, "it was myself. I should have told you before."

The little lawyer turned and looked at her admiringly. There were few people in the world he liked better. She was an old-maid aunt, and her aspect confirmed it. But no one else could have done a better job of rearing a family of orphaned O'Learys.

"I came downstairs sometime past midnight and found him here," she said. "He was very weary, poor fellow. He told me he was waiting for a friend. I felt sure it had to be Ronnie, because everybody else was in. So I led him to Ronnie's room and advised him to rest himself on the bed."

Ronnie lifted his head and said, "I never saw the guy before in my life. But when I came home from work, there he was parked on my bed. I shook him to wake him up and make him move over. I just thought he was a friend of—"

"I know," Malone said hastily. "Go on."

"Well, he didn't move, and I thought maybe he was sick. Maggie was coming down the stairs and I called her. It didn't take us long to find out he was dead. Then Maggie started calling you."

"Maggie," Malone said, "call a cab. Make it an Ajax. There's a stand a block from here."

While she was busy telephoning Malone issued a warning. "I want you all to stick to that story. It should not be difficult because you have nothing to conceal. A few slight deviations, however, will do no harm when the police get here. Maggie left for work as usual. Ronnie—you didn't want to wake up a sleeping guest. You can discover the body, say, thirty minutes from now. If the police give you any trouble—and they will—call me."

"Cab's on the way," Maggie said, returning into the room.

Malone nodded. "We've got to move. Remember, we're taking a statement on the Charlotte-Forstman case. And we've still got to get those witnesses."

He shook hands with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, gave Ronnie a pat on the shoulder, kissed Aunt Aggie, promised Grandfather O'Leary tickets to the next fight, pulled Katy's pigtails, and wound up with: "You've got your story straight, now stick to it."

He shoved Maggie through the doorway just as a *beep-beep* sounded from the cab outside.

II

HALFWAY DOWNTOWN the little lawyer said, "Maggie, I don't like this. I don't like it at all. He was wearing green socks."

Maggie said, *"What?"*

"Sailors don't ordinarily wear green socks," Malone told her. "And don't worry me with questions."

Back in the office, Malone threw his hat in the general direction of the couch, plumped down behind his desk, and began scanning a folder of papers he already knew by heart.

"Maggie," he said at last, "I don't like the Charlotte case either. But a million bucks is a million bucks."

"That," Maggie said, "you can say again and again and again. Even if you do get only forty per cent."

"What can you do with money," Malone said gloomily, "except maybe spend it. And possibly we won't even get it—not without those two witnesses."

"We've advertized for them," Maggie reminded him.

Malone chewed savagely on his cigar, got up and began to pace restlessly up and down the room.

"One man was riding down the Outer Drive on a motorcycle. He didn't stop. But he must have seen the crash in every detail. The other witness, according to Jake Charlotte, was standing at a bus stop. Why did both of them have to vanish before the cops and the ambulance arrived?"

"The second witness," Maggie said gently, "could have been waiting for a bus."

Malone ground out his cigar. "Fine thing," he muttered. He started on another cigar and said, "Maggie!" He finally lit the cigar. "Five forty-seven in the morning and he was waiting for a bus!" He looked up. "Maggie, there wouldn't be any suit except that Arthur Forstman happens to have about half the money in this hemisphere. So at a very small hour of the morning he drives home drunk—"

Maggie interrupted him to say, "That will have to be proven in court, Malone."

The little lawyer shoved his half-smoked cigar viciously into an ashtray. "Don't worry, it will be. Drunk or sober, he runs head on into the car of a small-time fur dealer named Jake Charlotte—who, by the way, has promised you a nice bit of rabbit if we win. Question: What was Charlotte doing out at that hour? Deponent isn't saying. His wife's ankle was broken. His car was smashed. So he sues for a cool million."

"It's our case," Maggie said softly. "Don't let us talk ourselves out of it by finding for the opposition."

He smiled at her. "I always like to visualize the opposition's

side. Here's my point. If Forstman hadn't long since lost count of his millions the entire affair would have been a simple little matter between insurance companies. Medical expenses, car repairs, et cetera. As it is—" He started on a new cigar. "Maggie, it must be hell to be rich!"

"I'd like to try it sometime," she said. "Malone—is everything going to be all right?"

"The sailor? Of course. All the O'Learys are in the clear—or soon will be." He hoped with all his heart that he was telling the truth. "Now go away and let me worry until Jake Charlotte comes in—or the cops come to tell me there's a dead sailor in your kid brother's bed."

Maggie managed a wan smile, went away, and came back fast.

"Malone," she said, "this was in the mail, along with a lot of bills you'd probably rather not see right at the moment. It might be important, and then again it might not be."

The little lawyer looked at the envelope. It was grimy, the stamp had been stuck on askew, and it was addressed in pencil. The name on the corner was HAROLD SPRUCE, and the return address was on North Clark Street. The note inside read as follows.

"Dear Sir, I saw your ad in the papers and I didn't go to the police account of I had a little trouble with the cops previous but I saw your ad and yes sir I was the man on the motorcycle."

"Well, you've got one of the missing witnesses," Maggie said, elation in her voice.

John J. Malone mopped his brow and nodded. "I was pretty sure the ad would pay off," he said. "We'll contact him before he changes his mind and—"

The phone rang, and Maggie turned pale. Malone smiled at her with a reassurance he didn't feel and reached for the instrument himself. His eyes widened in swift surprise. Looking significantly at his secretary he said genially:

"Mr. Featherstone? Good to hear from you! Just a minute while I transfer this call to my private office—"

He laid the receiver gently on the desk, and whispered to Maggie, "Plug in the extension phone and bring it in here—with your notebook. I want to have every word of this. It's Orlo O. Featherstone."

As she started for the extension phone she whispered back, "Isn't he the lawyer who saw Lincoln buried?"

"According to my information," Malone whispered in reply, "he saw Lincoln born." He smiled into the receiver and said, "Featherstone? Sorry about the delay. How about lunch at the Republican Club tomorrow? Or a date at the Chez? Oh, non-

sense. How do you do it? I could have *sworn* you weren't a day over fifty. Now what can I do for you besides telling you the story of your life?"

Maggie managed not to choke over that. Malone leaned back and lit his cigar. He listened for a moment in attentive silence, nodding as the other talked.

"The Forstman case? Featherstone, you're backing the wrong Pullman train."

Featherstone immediately countered with a proposal for a settlement. All medical expenses and repairs to the car. After all, Arthur Forstman must have been driving with care, since he had been taking a girl home from a party. Malone made a gentle remark about the hour he'd taken the girl home. Featherstone pointedly suggested that Malone must have been young once himself, and Malone winced.

Malone pointed out that Jake Charlotte's wife might never be able to walk again, and that the car had been damaged beyond repair. Furthermore the car was important to Mr. Charlotte's only means of livelihood, and there was such a thing as emotional shock—

Mr. Featherstone said that his client would settle for all medical bills, a new car, and two thousand dollars in cash.

"Your client—"

Maggie caught Malone's eye just in time. Her lips said, "Watch yourself, my fine talkative friend!"

"Your client was driving through a red light," Malone went on. "Moreover, he was drunk. He had not had sufficient sleep. He struck Mr. Charlotte's car—thereby putting Mr. Charlotte out of business, and injuring Mrs. Charlotte for life." Malone paused for breath. "We will settle," he said, "for one million dollars. Plus, of course, medical expenses and repairs to the car. Not to mention court costs and—this is most important—legal fees."

Orlo O. Featherstone pointed out that it might take five years for the case to come to court. Malone said cheerfully that he expected to live that long. He then asked Orlo O. Featherstone how he was feeling, in a very solicitous voice, and reminded him of the luncheon engagement at the Republican Club, and hung up with a smug smile on his face.

Maggie put down the notebook and said, "But Malone. How do you know?"

"I don't," Malone said. "I'm bluffing." He relit his cigar. "So far at least I'm holding only the joker. But once we get those witnesses—"

There was a little silence.

"Malone," she said at last. "Are you sure? About the sailor, I mean."

"A million buck lawsuit,"

Malone said, "and you worry me about dead sailors. I told you it would be all right. Switch all calls to my personal phone, and when Jake Charlotte turns up stall him in the office for a minute or two. Tell him I'm busy with an overseas call—and when I push the buzzer, send him in."

III

THERE WAS a sudden, quite alarmingly insistent pounding on the door. Maggie looked up, her face pale. "Malone, that's von Flanagan's knock! I'd recognize it through ear-muffs."

"Keep your thoughts to yourself," Malone said. "Go on taking dictation and let me do the worrying."

The pounding grew louder. Malone yelled, "Why don't you just open it? Don't break it down."

Von Flanagan came in like a red-faced hurricane, with two uniformed cops behind him. He motioned the pair to be quiet, and slammed the door shut.

"Malone, one of these days you're going to push me too far!" he said.

Malone smiled from behind his desk, and offered von Flanagan a cigar. "What's the beef?" he asked, his voice strangely gentle.

Von Flanagan sank down in the only easy chair in the office. He caught his breath, frowned at Malone, and refused the match Maggie offered him. "Thanks, I have a lighter." After a number of tries he accepted the match, and said, "Malone, we've been friends for a long time."

"Longer than that," Malone said. "You don't need to disrupt my morning's work to remind me, especially when I'm busy with an important lawsuit. Come on, what's the beef?"

"No beef," the big police officer said, breathing heavily. "I'm here to do a favor for Miss O'Leary, whom I have always looked upon as a friend." He nodded towards Maggie. "A guy turned up in her house dead. Dead as a doornail. Dead as a—"

"Never mind," Malone interrupted hastily. "Let's just say the man was dead."

"Just as you choose," von Flanagan said. "We were plenty thorough. We checked when he went in the house—and where he must have secured the poison."

Malone lifted a startled eyebrow.

"Chloral hydrate," von Flanagan said. "Chloral hydrate in a lethal dose. He seemed drunk when he strayed in, but actually he hadn't been drinking much. Maggie here is in the clear. Her whole clan is in the clear. That's according to the experts—and the time element."

He cleared his throat noisily. "But remember, Malone, I'm

your friend. Once in a while I read newspapers too. We managed to identify the man."

Malone lifted the other eyebrow.

"His name," von Flanagan said, "was Harold Spruce."

Malone sat absolutely silent for what seemed to him like ten thousand years.

"Don't get up now," von Flanagan said gently. "Wait for the count of nine. What have you to lose?"

Malone considered a number of possibilities. One of them was jumping out the window. Another was shooting himself in front of the Tribune Tower, something he'd always wished someone would do. A third was to steal a small boat from Navy Pier and steer for South America.

He threw his cigar butt inaccurately at the corner wastebasket and said, "Green socks."

"Malone," von Flanagan said anxiously. "I know this has been a great shock to you, and if you'd like a drink to steady your nerves—"

The little lawyer shook his head. "No," he said. "I'd like forty percent of a million dollars, but I'm afraid it's slipping away from me. Be that as it may, my immediate concern is centered in the late Harold Spruce. I don't especially want to look at him. I want to look at his clothes."

"Malone," von Flanagan said, "are you sure you feel all right?"

"I never felt better in my life," Malone assured him.

"If you really want a drink don't let my being here stand in the way—"

"Nonsense!" Malone said. He found his hat with a little difficulty and muttered, "Green socks. Green light."

Von Flanagan said, "I hope you know what you're doing. Remember, I trust you as far as I can throw the City Hall into Lake Michigan." He turned to Maggie and said, "As far as you and your family are concerned we feel you're all in the clear."

She looked up at him and said earnestly, "This is the first time in my life I've ever *really* wanted to kiss a cop!"

"Don't!" von Flanagan said, and fled into the anteroom.

There was a slight rumpus going on there. Kluchetsky and Scanlin were standing by a furious little man who looked angrily at Malone and said, "Well, it's about time."

He was an ugly, unctuous little man, with very little that was commendable in his behavior and general aspect. His clothes had a conspicuously expensive look, but he wore them in such a way that they did nothing to enhance his dignity.

He gave Malone a smug smile and asked, "Well, how is our lawsuit coming?"

Malone gave him back the same smile and said, "Fine—

just fine. I'm doing some important work on it now. I'll see you here in an hour, if you wish, and we can go over it in detail.'

"Hold on, Mr. Malone!" The little man was angry. "I just want to know—"

Malone swallowed his rage and said, "Mr. Charlotte, if you want to transfer this case to another lawyer, you're entirely free to do so. I'll let you know when I need to talk to you."

He calmed down a little. After all, Jake Charlotte was his client, and a million dollars had a certain eloquence of its own.

He put a reluctant hand on his client's shoulder. "I'm on my way now to see one of your witness," he said. "Everything is proceeding satisfactorily. Go home, and don't worry."

Malone's voice had a soothing quality, and his expression carried conviction. Jake Charlotte relaxed and smiled.

"Then I'll hear from you, Mr. Malone," he said, and took his departure.

After a minute's silence, von Flanagan growled, "You might at least have told him the witness you're going to see is dead."

On the way downtown Malone finally summoned enough composure to ask, "How did you identify him so quickly?" He had been on the point of adding "When there was no identification on him," but he caught himself just in time.

"Pure luck," von Flanagan said. "Plus, of course, some smart police work." He coughed modestly. "The guy had a girl friend who was waiting for him at home. He told her he had to go out on some important business, and promised to be back before midnight. Around ten o'clock this morning when her alarm reached the acute stage she started calling hospitals. Finally, she called the cops. By that time, of course, we had the dead sailor. She identified him, and so did his landlady."

Malone was beginning to feel that this was one of the days he should have spent sleeping.

The conviction grew on him even more after his second look within twenty-four hours at the dead sailor. He had died at a tragically early age but at least he'd died quietly and without pain. A handsome young man—with the daredevil smile of a motorcycle driver still on his face.

"According to the medical examiner," von Flanagan said, "he swallowed the poison about three hours before he died. It gave him time to move around a little. But why did he pick the O'Leary house?"

"Maybe he just picked the first house he came to," Malone said.

Von Flanagan shook his head. "Malone, it was the only house on the street. The rest were all apartment buildings. I tell you, he was *aimed* at that house."

Malone said, "Let's get out of here." On the way out demanded, "But who aimed him?"

The big policeman said nothing, in a nasty tone of silence.

"My missing witness," Malone mused out loud, "found dead in my secretary's house."

Von Flanagan's silence became almost profane.

"If you'll just let me take a look at those clothes," Malone said, "we'll remain friends."

This time von Flanagan gave him only a cold stare.

The expressive silence remained mutual all the way up to von Flanagan's office. The big police officer said a few terse words into the intercom and a moment later Scanlin came in with a bundle.

Malone looked over the contents, and made a swift inventory. A sailor suit. Underwear—not Navy issue. A pair of green socks. A crumpled handkerchief. Black shoes, newly polished.

He tossed the articles of clothing back on von Flanagan's desk. "Save these for me," he said.

The angry-faced police officer almost strangled on the single word, "*Why.*"

"Someday," Malone said, "I may want to give them to the Salvation Army. On the other hand, I might want to unravel them and knit them up into rugs. Or, crochet up a set of doilies . . . But how," he finished mildly, "did you know he was my missing witness?"

"Because," von Flanagan said, even more mildly, "he sent a little note to the police department mentioning you and saying that he'd decided to come forward. Now how about your other missing witness?"

"I hope the police find him," Malone said, "before the killer does."

IV

THE INSTANT Malone left the elevator in his office building he knew that s o m e t h i n g was wrong. He went in through the door to his private office and buzzed for Maggie."

"Has anyone called?" he asked.

"Malone," she said in a very soft voice, "Mr. Forstman is here to see you. Mr. *Arthur Forstman.* The name should mean *something* to you."

Malone waited a full minute before coming to a decision. "Don't send him right in," he said. "Tell him I'm busy. I'll buzz you when I'm free."

"Malone," she whispered, "everything is all right, isn't it? About the—"

"It is," Malone said. "Now go away and don't worry."

He spent nearly ten minutes inaccurately working a crossword puzzle. Then he buzzed Maggie.

She ushered in Arthur Forstman. "Will you need me?" she asked and without waiting for

Malone to shake his head, discreetly closed the door.

Malone rose from behind his desk, extended a cordial hand—it wasn't every day a multi-millionaire paid him a visit—and ushered his guest into the one comfortable chair.

"Sorry I had to keep you waiting," he said, "but I was on the long-distance phone. I was trying to get some information on this Harold Spruce person."

"Oh," Arthur Forstman said, fumbling for a cigarette.

The little lawyer gave him a close look. Forstman had the kind of face that should have been ruddy. Instead it was pale. His hands, that could so competently handle golf clubs, polo mallets, and racing cars should have been steady. But Malone had to leap around the desk and hold a match to a cigarette held between shaking fingers.

He didn't bother to ask if the wealthy sportsman would care for a drink. He rinsed out a glass, opened the file drawer labelled EMERGENCY and pulled out the bottle of brandy he'd been saving for a chance meeting with Grace Kelly, or Marilyn Monroe.

Arthur Forstman downed it straight without batting even one eyelash. "Malone, I've got to talk to you about something I can't discuss with anyone else."

Malone listened, very quietly.

"I'm here to make you an offer," the tall, slightly-graying man said. He slumped down in his chair.

Malone gave him sixty seconds, catfooted around the desk to refill his glass, and said, "Mr. Featherstone has already made one, and I turned it down."

Arthur Forstman sat up very straight. "That isn't what I mean," he said. "Sure, I'd settle with that slimy little crook. It would be worth it to get him off my neck. But, Malone, this is something else. That man who was found murdered this morning—"

There was a little silence, and then Malone said, "Yes?"

"He was one of the witnesses. Obviously I'm going to be accused of having him done in. I'll pay you a five thousand dollar fee if you can prove I had nothing to do with it."

Malone got up, walked to the window and looked out. The customary Indian Summer heat wave was sending little light shivers across the tops of the buildings. Sooner or later there would be rain.

"And one thousand dollars down," the voice said behind him, "as a retainer."

Malone argued with the voice of temptation for about thirty seconds. The emergency fund was cleaned out, he might need money for Maggie, and he wasn't sure how Joe the Angel would react to a touch.

He turned around and said, "Put your money in your pocket. Let's talk about more pleasant things. A cracked up car, and a badly injured woman—"

Forstman turned white and Malone reached for the brandy bottle again.

"We were driving home," Forstman said. "Sure it was late. We'd been to a party down on the south side to celebrate our engagement."

"Where?" Malone asked wearily.

"At William Turner's. The broker, you know. She's May Turner, his niece. It got to be late. I was driving her home. She went to sleep on the way." Forstman relit his cigarette with hands that shook only a little now.

"It all happened so suddenly. The street ahead was empty. I'd had a few drinks at the party, but I wasn't drunk. I may have been exceeding the speed limit, but I don't think so."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "I'm the opposition lawyer, remember? Save your confessions for the courtroom."

Forstman managed a thin smile. "I'm only trying to tell you the truth. Suddenly this car came out of a sidestreet and smashed into us. The rest was all pretty much confusion. I know I was completely stunned for a minute, and I guess the Charlottes were too." He crushed out the cigarette and started on another one.

"It's none of my business," Malone said, wishing he didn't like Arthur Forstman so much, "and I shouldn't be asking you this, being on the other side. But how did you know there were two witnesses?"

"I saw one," Forstman said. "It was just before the crash. He was standing on the bus stop corner. I remember hoping he wouldn't try to cross the street. And then, at the moment of the crash, this man on a motorcycle raced by. That's all I remember for a few minutes."

He closed his eyes for a moment. "I tried to get out of the car. I wasn't hurt, but I was pinned in. I thanked God that May was all right. She'd waked up, a little frightened, but perfectly calm. We could hear Mrs. Charlotte screaming. May could get out on her side of the car, and she ran out to see how badly Mrs. Charlotte had been hurt. Then she ran down the road until she could flag down a car to send a call for the police. The rest you know."

"May," Malone commented, "sounds like a level-headed girl in an emergency."

Arthur Forstman's eyes lighted up as though someone had struck a match to them. "May," he said simply, "is wonderful."

After a long moment he went on: "About this lawsuit. I'd be

willing to settle on generous terms, but I'm damned if I'll have people going around saying I arranged for a witness to be murdered in order to avoid a lawsuit."

Malone tapped the ash from his cigar and said, "Obviously I can't take you as a client, since Charlotte has already engaged me. Neither can I take your money. I will do my best to ascertain whether you were or were not guilty of arranging for the murder of Harold Spruce. If you didn't, you have nothing to worry about. You don't need me. If you did—" he paused, coughed delicately and said, "We can talk about that another time. It would alter the entire picture."

He rose, walked around the desk, smiled reassuringly and said, "There's always the possibility that the murder of Harold Spruce had nothing to do with your little mishap."

Arthur Forstman said hoarsely, "In that case, why was his body found in your secretary's house?"

Malone reflected that he'd like to know that himself. "It could be pure coincidence," he said. "Meantime, *don't worry!*"

Forstman's goodby handshake was a solid one.

Maggie came in—after he had left—with her notebook and said, "I got every word of it down. But I thought you always saved that 'don't worry' line for clients and prospective clients."

"For all I know," Malone said gloomily, "he *is* a prospective client."

"Malone," she said in a sad little voice, "what do we do now?"

He managed to smile at her. "We don't worry. I can say that to you because you're also a client, and I may be my own client before this is over. You do three things. First you check with your blessed family as to what time the sailor got there. Next, you call Doctor Flamm and ask him how long it would take for a fatal dose of chloral hydrate to take effect. Third, you bring me the classified phone directory. I've got to call up every costumer in town."

Malone looked at the directory wearily. So far it had been a busy day, and promised to be even busier.

Maggie stuck her head around the corner of the door. "Malone," she said, "try Campbell's first."

"Maggie," he said happily, "an inspiration! In fact, I think I'll try it in person!"

Naturally, it had to be Campbell's! Why hadn't he thought of it himself!

He caught himself on the verge of telling the elevator man to drive faster, and went back to thinking about Campbell's. There were other costumers in Chicago, and good ones. But the renting of the sailor suit was the job of

someone who didn't ordinarily rent costumes.

With such a job in prospect Campbell's would naturally be the first place that came to mind. Almost everyone knew that Campbell's, highly listed in the Classified Directory, would rent anything—including, probably, a second-hand space ship, and certainly, a sailor suit.

And if he were wrong, he reminded himself, he could still tackle the others.

That reminded him of something else. He felt in his pockets and found fifty-five cents left over from the emergency fund. It was no time to go back and talk to Maggie, with all the worries she had on her mind.

With a heavy sigh, he walked down the street to Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

Joe greeted him with all the heavy cordiality he would have given to the main exhibit at a wake. He slid a drink across the bar without being asked. "Malone," he said mournfully, "I *am* sorry."

"Don't worry," Malone said, "you know you'll get it back."

Joe the Angel's eyes widened. "You mean you need *money?* Why did you not say so? How much you need?"

The little lawyer caught his breath and said, "Just cab fare."

"Cab fare to where?" Joe the Angel demanded. "State and Madison, or Gary, Indiana?"

"I don't know yet," Malone said, wishing he were asleep.

After a brief discussion, they settled for ten, and Joe the Angel marked it up on Malone's bill.

"And Malone," he said sadly, "I am sorry that you lose the witness. I read it in the papers."

"Oh," Malone said quickly, "*that!* Nothing important." He relit his cigar. "I have another one. And besides, I had an offer of a settlement. Maggie has it all down on paper." He puffed at the cigar. "For a million dollars."

Joe the Angel turned pale. He broke a rule of the house and poured himself a drink, gulped it down, coughed and said, "But, Malone! A million dollars—"

"—is a million dollars," Malone finished for him. He rose and started for the door.

"Wait, Malone," Joe the Angel gasped. He reached for the cash register. "Better you take another ten. And, one on the house, Malone!"

V

CAMPBELL'S in North State Street, was famous and fabulous. One window displayed sets of duelling pistols, another, a suit of armor. A sign read WE BUY, SELL, OR RENT ANYTHING.

Malone made his way through the semi-darkness of the elderly building, ducked away from a cigar store Indian who had a mean look, glanced briefly at a

display of a fortune's worth of antique jewelry, bypassed a table loaded with second-hand kitchen utensils labelled ANYTHING YOU SEE, FIVE CENTS, and finally, a shaken man, wound up at the costume rental department.

"I'd like to see a man about a sailor suit," he said.

The pleasant-faced young man said, "I doubt if we have anything to fit you, sir, but—"

"No," the little lawyer said. "*No!* I don't want to rent a sailor suit. I just want to *ask* about one."

The young man, not looking quite as pleasant, said, "Yes, sir. Now if you will give me his size—"

"I don't know his size," Malone said explosively. "That's what I came to ask you!"

"Perhaps you'd like to talk to the manager?" the young man said anxiously.

"Perhaps I'd like to talk to you," Malone said. He lit a cigar and began to relax.

"If there's any complaint—" the young man said.

"I won't make it," Malone said warmly. "I'm just asking about the rental of a sailor suit, sometime yesterday, or maybe the day before. Who rented it and when."

"I'll check the books, sir," the young man said. "And you are—?"

"Malone," the little lawyer said grimly. "John J. Malone."

"*That* Malone!" A light came in the young man's eyes. "I'll check for you, right away."

He came back in an amazingly short time, with the records. The suit had been rented the day before, at 6:00 p.m., just before closing time. A deposit had been left. The renter had signed for it as Jack Johnson, address 3145 East Huron Street.

Malone reflected unhappily that not only did the name Jack Johnson show a shocking lack of originality, but that 3145 East Huron Street would be halfway across Lake Michigan. He said gently, "And what did he look like?"

"I don't know, sir. *Mister* Malone, I mean. I didn't see him, because I wasn't here. You see, I'm a substitute. Usually, I'm in stuffed birds. The regular man here left on his two weeks' vacation early this morning."

Malone said a very bad word under his breath, and asked, "Where was he going?"

The young man looked even more unhappy, shook his head and said, "Maybe the assistant manager would know."

The assistant manager looked at Malone as though he suspected him of attempting to shop-lift a suit of antique armor.

"This gentleman," the young man said breathlessly, "is trying to locate Walter—"

"I'm a lawyer," Malone said quickly. He handed out one of

the business cards Maggie had insisted on having printed. "Walter may be the key man in a million dollar lawsuit. If I can locate him—"

The assistant manager's eyes softened. "I wish I could help you. A million dollars is a lot of money, isn't it? But Walter left this morning on a fishing trip. He himself didn't know where he was going. He'll be back in two weeks." He accepted the cigar Malone offered him. "Tell you what I'll do. He's bound to send postcards or souvenirs. The minute we hear from him, I'll telephone you."

"More than fair enough," Malone said.

"Sir," the young man said, after the assistant manager had gone, "there's a chance someone in the store might have noticed him. Would you like me to ask around?"

"I would," Malone said. He leaned on the counter, and concentrated his gaze on a glass-encased bull-fighter's costume. He had about decided he would look well in it when the young man came back.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "Nobody noticed anything or anybody. That's a busy time of day. People are always coming in and out."

"It's all right," Malone said. "You did the best you could." He fumbled through his pockets. "Do you and your girl-friend like the fights?"

The young eyes brightened. "How did you know I had a girl friend?"

"You looked as though you would," Malone said. He handed over the fight tickets he'd planned to give to von Flanagan. "Thanks for everything, and have fun," he said and again fought his way through the maze.

In a state of utter despondency, he ignored an available cab, and rode the streetcar to his office.

So far, everything had gone wrong, and what would happen next he didn't know and didn't want to guess.

He snarled at the elevator man, a friend of many years standing, strode into his private office, slammed his door, threw his hat in the general direction of the couch, glared through the window at a sky that was already beginning to cloud, and finally slumped down in the chair behind his desk and yelled for Maggie.

She arrived as though she'd been jet-propelled.

He lit a cigar and glared at it. "Nothing," he said hoarsely. "Absolutely nothing." He added the details. "The chances are that if this clerk does turn up—it'll turn out that the man who rented the sailor suit was Harold Spruce himself."

"Malone," Maggie said, "don't be discouraged."

"I'll be discouraged if I want to," Malone said.

"There are a couple of women waiting to see you," Maggie said. "One, blonde."

"I don't care," the little lawyer growled, "if the whole Chez Paree chorus is waiting in the outer office. What did *you* find out?" He looked at her hopefully.

Her face clouded. "Malone," she said gravely, "a little less than nothing. I checked with Dr. Flamm. The sailor must have gotten the drink less than a few minutes—say, ten—before he got to our house. I checked with the family as to when he came in. And I called Matthew about bars. There isn't one within half an hour's walking distance. And since he had no car, he must have walked. Malone,"—her face whitened—"does that mean he got it after he came in our house?"

"No," Malone said, "no, no, no, *no*" He got up, kicked the wastebasket savagely and began pacing the floor. "Somebody drove him to, or near your door. The same somebody probably offered him a drink from a loaded bottle. *Why?* I don't know. *Who?*" He paused in his pacing. "I don't know that yet either."

Malone looked through his window at the Chicago rooftops. The dreary gray rain was beginning. Why was it, he wondered, that important crimes always happened during a record-breaking heat-wave, a blizzard, or the rainy season!

"Maggie," he said quietly, "I begin to feel as though I were hitting my head with a brick wall."

"You mean—" she began.

"I know exacty what I mean," he said.

"The word for it," Maggie said acidly, "is frustrated. And you have two people waiting—mother and child."

Malone managed a wan smile and said, "Bring on the dancing girls."

VI

THE GIRL WAS very young, very blonde, very pretty, and right now, very tearful. Her mother looked as though her face should be carved into the side of a mountain.

"It's about Harold," the girl said. "Harold Spruce."

Malone bounded to his feet and ushered them into the best chairs as though they were visiting royalty. He caught himself on the verge of offering cigars.

He excused himself, whipped into the outer office, and said to Maggie, "Phone the drug store and have them send up a quart of ice cream—strawberry—and rush. With dishes and spoons. And, you take down every word of what they say."

He slowed down at the door.

"Sorry for the interruption," he apologized. "And very sorry I kept you waiting so long." He gave the girl his most reassuring smile and said, "Now, my dear—?"

She gave back a very small smile. "Mr. Malone, my name is Dawn O'Day—"

"Emmaline," her mother said, in a voice as cold as an Eskimo's icebox, "tell the man the truth."

Her blue eyes freshened with a promise of new tears. "All right, Mr. Malone, my name is Emmaline Biggers. But I'm studying to be a model, and you can't get far with a name like that. And Ma—"

Ma said, "My name is Mrs. Emma Biggers, and I've gotten along fine with it for years."

Malone smiled impartially at them both. "Never mind the names," he said. "How about Harold Spruce?"

"Ma said I should talk to you. Harold wouldn't want me to tell you this. I mean, he wouldn't *have* wanted to tell you this. But now he can't be hurt—"

The tears started again. Malone grabbed for his handkerchief, but Ma Emma beat him to it with a wad of Kleenex.

Providentially, the ice cream arrived at that moment.

"Don't cry into it," Malone ordered. "It doesn't taste good with salt."

The tears began to dry. Ma Emma looked as though a smile might appear on the great stone face.

"I really wanted to be a stenographer," Emmaline said, "like Ma wanted me to, and I went to a business school. But seemed like I couldn't learn to type, and my spelling isn't so good. Seems like I'm dumb." She gulped down another spoonful of ice cream.

Malone looked at her, at the face, the hair, and the figure, and decided she could afford to be dumb. He said gently, "Now that I've heard the story of your life, tell me about Harold Spruce. And *dont' cry!*"

"Emmaline," Ma Emma said, for the third time, "tell the truth."

"Come on, Dawn," Malone said warmly. "He'd want you to tell me." He gave her the best smile he had at the moment. "You know he should have stopped at the scene of an accident."

She took another gulp of ice cream. "He couldn't stop," she said, "because of the motorcycle."

"You mean, the motorcycle wouldn't stop?"

"No. But he couldn't stop because it wasn't *his* motorcycle."

Malone counted to ten, slowly. "You mean he stole it?"

"He borrowed it," Emmaline said miserably. "It belonged to the owner of the gas station where he worked. He'd borrowed it a lot of times. But if the

owner found out, Harold would have lost his job. He saw the wreck, but of course he couldn't stop. Maybe he should have stopped. He might have lost his job but he wouldn't have lost his *life!"*

"Now, Emmaline!" Ma Emma said. She reached for more Kleenex, just in case.

"Finish your ice cream before it melts, Dawn," Malone said gently.

"Well, then there was the lawsuit. It was in the papers. He said he was going to make so much from it that he wouldn't care about the job. He called up those people—I mean both of them—and told them he would be available as a witness."

"Tell the truth," Ma Emma said.

"Well, I mean he said he could—well, he could, for a price—" She gulped, wiped her eyes, finished the ice cream and licked the spoon. "He was offered five thousand dollars. Then he was offered a cut of the take."

"Emmaline!" Ma Emma said.

"Well, that's exactly the way he said it. And then one of the gentlemen got to be very friendly. He gave Harold a little money from time to time. And then yesterday Harold stopped by on his way from work."

She paused, blew her nose, and said, *"Ma!"*

Ma Emma passed over the rest of the ice cream.

The little blonde took a spoonful, looked at Malone and said, "He was very happy. His new friend had asked him to play a practical joke on someone. It was some kind of a birthday joke, Harold said. And Harold loved jokes. He was going to be paid for it."

Ma Emma said, "Tell the truth. Harold loved money even more than he loved jokes."

"Ma, please!"

"Don't bleat at me," Ma Emma said grimly. "Harold was a boy of no character. He loved money. He had a good job, but he came to the house almost every night. Not to see Emmaline, like she thought, but because he'd get a free meal."

"Ma!"

"Shut up," Ma Emma said. "I'm telling the truth. The only other thing he cared about was moving fast. That's why he borrowed his boss's motorcycle. He was saving his money to buy a racing car. That's why he was willing to take a bribe. And besides," she added disapprovingly, "he drank."

Malone thanked his lucky stars he hadn't offered Ma Emma gin instead of ice cream. "Now, Dawn, don't cry any more," he said soothingly. "Just tell me the rest of the joke."

"Well," she said miserably, "he was supposed to rent some kind of costume, and meet his friend and go to this house, and

pretend to be a friend of the family."

"One thing more," Malone said. "Harold did see the accident, that we know. He must have described it to you." He wished for luck and said, "Did he tell you if the stop-light was green or red?"

"He didn't tell me," she said. "I guess because I didn't ask him."

The little lawyer counted to ten silently.

"That's all I know," she said. "That's all. Except that he's dead." She grabbed at the Kleenex again.

"Now, Emmaline," Ma Emma said, in a voice that was actually gentle. "Mr. Malone, we'll be going now. And thank you for the ice cream."

Malone bowed them to the door as though they'd been a pair of visiting Hollywood stars, and turned to Maggie. "How many of your brothers were in the Navy?"

"All of them," she said in an unhappy voice. Her face was pale. "Ronnie only two years."

"Therefore," Malone growled, lighting a fresh cigar, "your whole family would have been definitely receptive to a young man who turned up dressed as a sailor, looking for a friend. That explains the rented suit, and the green sox." He sighed deeply. "But we will seem to get right back to where we started."

"Find the other witness," Maggie said acidly.

"According to the latest census," Malone said just as acidly, "there are three and a half million people in Chicago. And no one, including Jake Charlotte, can give us a description of him. Just a shadowy figure at a bus stop, in the gray pre-dawn mist."

"Malone," Maggie said, "you'll never be a poet. Have any of you geniuses in this case thought of talking to the bus driver?" As Malone stared at her, she went on, "Your missing witness was waiting at a bus stop. Obviously, he was waiting for a bus. Obviously a bus must have come along. Obviously, there must have been a bus driver. There's less than a three-and-a-half-millionth chance you'll learn anything, but it's worth a try."

"Maggie," Malone said happily, "*you* are the genius in this case! Get me the address of the bus company!"

She grinned at him. "And incidentally, the exact census figure is three million, six hundred and twenty thousand, nine hundred and sixty-two."

"Now minus one," Malone said. "Hurry up, genius, get me that address."

VII

FOR THE FIRST time that day Malone began to feel that life could be made worth living. The

taxi he took to the bus office seemed to be a jet-propelled cloud.

The Head Dispatcher turned out to be a long-faced man with a definitely pessimistic disposition and, Malone suspected, ulcers. He looked even gloomier as Malone explained the situation.

"I'll look it up in the records," he said in a voice like a radio announcer advertizing cut-rate funerals. He came back in a few minutes. "It was Melrose," he said. "Bill Melrose. But he can't help you, Mr. Malone. He didn't see the accident. By his schedule, he must have gone by the corner just before it happened."

The little lawyer scowled. "Are you sure?" he said.

The Head Dispatcher looked at Malone as though he were an unwanted idiot child. He said patiently, "Because if he'd seen the accident, he would have stopped to see if he could offer emergency assistance. Then he would have reported it to the police, and put it in his own daily report here. Those are strict rules, and we enforce them."

Malone thought about the still unknown witness who had been waiting for a chance. If the bus had just gone by, he wouldn't have been waiting there.

"Just the same," he said stubbornly, "I'd like to talk with him."

The Head Dispatcher sighed again. "I'll see if I can find him for you. He's just gone off duty, but he may still be around."

He went away again and came back with a man with a friendly grin and built along the general lines of a top league basketball star. "Just luck he was still here," he said gloomily, "but he can't do you no good."

"That's right," Bill Melrose said. "I'm sorry, but I must have gone through that crossing about one minute before it happened. The papers say it happened at 5:47 a.m. because that's what both the dashboard clocks stopped at when the crash came. So according to my schedule, I must've gone past about 5:45 or 5:46."

Malone shook his head sadly. "Well, I had to check everything. Too bad you weren't a few minutes late that morning."

He turned on one of his best smiles and said to the Head Dispatcher, "Thanks for all your trouble. May I buy you a beer?"

"I'm still on duty!" the Dispatcher said, as though he were prophesying the end of the world.

Malone turned the same smile on Bill Melrose. "Why, yes, and thanks very much," he said.

There was, as always, a little place across the street, which, though not the best in the world, was at least, the nearest. Comfortably settled in a secluded booth, Malone suggested that his

guest might like something better than beer.

Bill Melrose again said, "Thank you very much," and ordered gin and coke.

Malone winced, ordered rye with a beer chaser, and then quoted Ma Emma by saying, "Tell the truth, Bill," in his best courtroom manner.

Bill Melrose turned pale and started to say, "I am—" as Malone had expected he would, turned even more pale and said, "Well, you see—" as Malone had also expected he would. He'd intimidated far tougher witnesses than Bill Melrose.

"I've got a wife and kids." They always had, the little lawyer reflected. "I've also got an accident record. I know I should have stopped. But I see this pile-up ahead of me and I lose my head. Maybe they figure I'm somehow involved. And I've been warned, one more and I lose my job. The bus is empty, so it's just a matter of driving by fast."

He took a big gulp of his drink. "But I see this guy on the corner. He's one of my regulars. I think fast. I stop quick, open the door, grab him in. He seemed dazed. We was eight blocks up the street before he really comes to. I explain my situation. He understands it. He's been riding with me a long time. There aren't many passengers that early in the run, and we talk about this and that, and get to be good friends. So he agrees to keep his trap shut."

Malone waved for another round.

"Now," Bill Melrose said wretchedly, "I suppose I got us both in trouble and I suppose I'll lose my job." He took half his drink in one gulp, and said automatically, "Thanks very much." Then he added, "And me with a wife and five kids."

"Bless you, Bill Melrose," Malone said, downing his own drink, "and bless the wife and the five kids, too. You are not going to lose your job. Neither you nor your friend are going to get into any trouble. Just tell me where I can find this guy."

The grin and the color began to come back to the bus driver's face. "Why sure," he said. "His name's Don Cass. I don't know where he lives, but I know where he works." He looked almost cheerful. "The fact is, my car's right here, and I'll drive you there."

This time it was Malone who said, "Thanks very much." Joe the Angel's investment was dwindling rapidly. He was halfway in the car before he remembered his new friend's accident record.

His worst suspicions were immediately verified. Bill Melrose drove like an inspired madman in a hurry. Malone tried to keep his eyes closed and hoped that in

time he would be able to forget.

They came to a squealing stop in front of a very small novelty store, one of the many selling cigars, cigarettes, candy and a few comic magazines. Malone had talked to the owners of enough of them to know that total sales from merchandise would probably not be sufficient to pay the light bill.

The fat faced woman behind the counter informed Malone that Don Cass had gone for the day. She looked at him suspiciously and added, "You can see him tomorrow. He's here any time after six-thirty."

Just in time, Malone thought, to get the early dope from the eastern tracks.

"I'm sorry," he said smoothly, "but it's urgent. I've got to see him today." He tried turning on a little charm and realized right away it wouldn't work.

Her hard eyes narrowed and she said sharply, "He isn't in any trouble, is he?"

"No," Malone said. "No, no, no, *no*!" He handed one of his cards. "He's wanted as a witness in a lawsuit. A million dollar lawsuit." He saw her eyes widen, and added quickly, "He'll probably make a good thing of it himself." It was amazing, he told himself, and sometimes heartbreaking—the effect that the magic words "a million dollars" had on practically everyone.

"That's a lot of money," she said dreamily. She was silent for a moment, and Malone could almost hear what was going on in her mind. Finally she said, a little warily, "I'll give you his address. But mind you don't get him into no trouble."

She pulled out a notepad, wrote quickly, and came up with a smile that cracked her pancake makeup almost from ear to ear. "And since you're here, I've got a very good thing for tomorrow. Mr. Bat, in the fifth."

VIII

IT WAS WELL worth the two dollars, Malone decided, as he walked out the door after a very cordial goodbye. And besides, Mr. Bat might win.

Bill Melrose opened the car door and automatically Malone got in.

"She gave me his address," Malone said, and handed over the paper.

"Fine," Bill Melrose said. "Fine, fine." He reached over and slammed the door. "I'll drive you there," he said.

The little lawyer shuddered. Then he remembered that the way to stay young was to live dangerously, and hoped for the best.

The rain had turned to an unpleasant nasty drizzle. It had also turned the streets into something resembling a newly waxed floor.

"Y'know, Malone," Bill Melrose said, "I was a race track driver for a coupla years when I was a kid." Suddenly he scooted around a delivery truck, narrowly missing a car coming in the opposite direction. He said cheerfully, "Better to go around 'em than hit 'em. It saves time.

"As I was saying, Malone, I worked six years in New York, cabbing. One year, ambulance driving. Then I got married. Her folks live in Chicago so we came out here. Being a married man, I figured I'd get into something safe."

Passing a streetcar on the left, causing a momentary traffic tangle from which he emerged miraculously unscathed, he went right on, "So now I pilot a bus."

Malone said weakly, "Do you ever ride a bicycle? Or a horse?"

Bill Melrose took his hands off the wheel for a split second, glanced at Malone at the same time. *"Me?"* he said. "You think I'm crazy? Those things are dangerous!"

There was an immediate tangle with the driver of an opposition car, and an exchange of dialogue which included nouns, verbs and adjectives that even Malone had never heard before.

"See?" Bill Melrose said, still indignant. "Guys like that never heard of no safe driving." He muttered a few more words under his breath, and Malone hoped he could remember them. "Well, hang on, Malone. We're here."

He managed a completely illegal but successful U-turn, disregarding a symphony of indignantly honking horns, and stopped in front of a No-Parking sign in front of one of Chicago's better remodeled old mansions on the near north side. This time, the car didn't squeal to a stop. It only shivered. There was an echo from Malone.

"I'll go up with you," Bill Melrose said cheerfully, and acquaint you with him, so he'll know you're all right. Then, on account of you might like to talk private, I'll exit. I gotta check these brakes anyway, on account of they don't work right. I've been putting it off too long."

For one of the few times in his life, Malone was close to fainting.

In the glassed-in vestibule at the top of the weathered brownstone steps was the usual list of tenants, and apartment numbers, some typed, some clipped from business cards, and some lettered in ink. Bill Melrose pushed the button opposite *Cass*.

It was almost a matter of seconds before a buzz sounded, and Bill Melrose shoved open the door.

The first door on the right opened, and a small figure appeared in the doorway. In the half dusk of the hallway Malone suddenly remembered the prophetic description he'd given

Maggie. "A shadowy figure . . . in the gray pre-dawn mist."

The figure was shadowy, all right, the more so in the dim-lighted hallway. Gray suit, light gray shirt, dark gray tie, gray hair. Gray eyes, too.

"This is a good friend of mine, Don," Bill Melrose said. "You can trust him. He's going to tell you how to make a lot of money, fast. Name's Malone. John J. Malone." He caught his breath and added, "I'll go fix them brakes, Malone." And vanished.

Don Cass said, in what might have passed for cordiality in an ice-cube tray, "Pleased to meet you." Then, fixing Malone with eyes that might have been those of an alligator left overnight in a deep freeze, he demanded, "What's the pitch?"

Malone said, "It's just a little piece of business for a client. There might be some money in it for you."

The alligator eyes thawed out just a trifle, and by the time Malone had explained the purpose of his visit they were, if not friendly, at least candid.

"It was early in the morning. I was a bit sleepy, I guess. Anyway, when my pal Melrose came along I hopped into the bus. Sure, I saw the accident, but Melrose asked me to keep my mouth shut. He didn't want to lose his job. I guess anybody'd do that much for a pal."

Malone said, "Did you notice whether the traffic light was green or red?"

"I didn't notice nothin'," Don Cass told him. "I told you, it was early in the morning. I was sleepy. I just hopped in and we was off before anyone could say—"

"Jackie Robinson," Malone prompted.

"Jackie who?"

"Never mind," Malone said. He had a hunch Don Cass was telling the truth about the lights, and decided to try another tack. "Okay, forget the lights. There was an accident. You're a material witness. Of course you could be subpoenaed—"

The eyes froze up again. "I ain't tanglin' with the law. Not me. Not for nobody."

"You don't have to," Malone told him. "Not if you follow my advice." He assumed his best cell-side manner. "I'm your friend, Mr. Cass. I promise you that neither you nor Mr. Melrose will be in any trouble. All you need to do is call up Mr. Jake Charlotte and tell him you're the missing witness. Tell him you're ready to talk—at a price, of course."

He scribbled a telephone number and handed it to Cass. "Tell him to meet you here at eight o'clock tonight."

Don Cass looked down at the piece of paper Malone had handed him. "Are you sure

it's—" he began, and dropped the question. "Is that all I got to do?" he asked instead.

"Just one more thing," Malone said. He scribbled another telephone number and handed it to Cass, saying, "When you've finished calling Mr. Charlotte call this number and ask for Mr. Arthur Forstman. Tell him you're the missing witness and you're willing to talk—at a price, of course."

Just the faintest crinkle of a smile played around the corners of Don Cass's steel gray eyes. "I see," he said. "Both ends against the middle. Pretty smart."

"Let's just say, playing it fair," Malone said. "Tell Mr. Forstman to meet you here tonight at eight o'clock sharp."

"Wait a minute! What are you trying to do, get me surrounded?"

Malone reassured him. "There will be protection. I'll see to it myself. And there'll be money in it for you—cash money. If you play your cards right, understand?"

"I don't know nothin' about cards," Cass said. "Cards ain't my racket." He rose and followed Malone to the door. "But I can tip you off to a good one in the fifth at Hialeah. Black Jet."

Malone parted reluctantly with two of the three dollars he had left and took the streetcar back to the office.

"I drew a blank," Malone told Maggie as he tossed his hat on the rack and sank into his swivel chair. "Cass doesn't remember if the traffic light was red or green. I think he's telling the truth."

"The light was red," Maggie said.

Malone unwrapped a cigar in a slow double take, reached for the desk lighter and froze in shocking fashion just as he was about to light up. "What did you say?"

"The light was red," Maggie repeated, perfectly dead pan.

Malone just gaped at her, waiting for her to go on.

"Don't look at me as if *I* was the missing witness," Maggie continued. "It just occurred to me to ask them, that's all."

"Ask who?"

"Ask *whom,*" Maggie corrected him. "Why, the traffic department, of course. I called them up and asked them to check on it. Those lights are clocked, timed to the split second. At five forty-seven a.m. the light was red. Forstman was driving through a red light. That means Jake Charlotte was driving through a green light. It's as simple as that."

Malone said, "Remind me to raise your salary five dollars. No, make it ten. Which reminds me—you couldn't spare a couple of bucks cash, could you? And get me von Flanagan."

Maggie produced two tired,

crumpled dollar bills from her purse. Then she dialed police headquarters and got the chief of homicide on the phone.

"Meet me at one thousand and twelve Goethe Street at eight o'clock tonight." Malone told von Flanagan. "Be there with friends. We've got a date to meet the man who murdered the sailor." He hung up.

Maggie said, "I hope you know what you're doing."

"If I don't, you'll read about it in the obituary column in the morning paper," Malone said.

IX

EARLY THAT evening at Joe the Angel's City Hall bar the little lawyer, waiting for the appointed hour of the meeting at Don Cass's apartment, brooded over his drink while Joe nodded sympathetically, polishing glasses.

"A million dollars riding on the turn of a red or green traffic light, a dead sailor turns up in Maggie's apartment, and who is he? No friend of Maggie's, or of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John." Joe nodded, puzzled but pious at the mention of the apostles and went on polishing his glasses. "So what happens? It turns out he's wearing green socks."

"Sailors don't wear green socks," Joe said helpfully.

"Right," Malone said. "So it turns out he's Harold Spruce, the missing witness in the million dollar damage suit—dead."

Joe the Angel shook his head in genuine, if uncomprehending, sympathy.

"And so it goes," Malone said dolefully. "The guy saw the accident but he couldn't talk because he was driving a motorcycle that didn't belong to him and he had no business being out with. The bus driver saw the accident but he can't talk because he failed to stop. He had an accident record he concealed from the company when he got the job, so he was afraid of getting mixed up in the affair. Then there's the passenger who can't talk because he's afraid of getting his friend the bus driver in trouble. And everybody holding out till he sees how much there's in it for him."

Joe the Angel shrugged. "A million dollars is a million dollars," he said.

"So I've heard tell," Malone said sourly. He was beginning to wish he'd *never* heard it. He looked at his watch. It was time to be off for Don Cass's apartment. He looked across the bar at Joe.

"Speaking of a million dollars," Malone said, "you couldn't spare a five spot, could you? For cab fare. It costs money to make money, you know."

Joe the Angel rang up *No Sale* on the register and handed

five singles across the bar to Malone.

"Thanks," Malone said, "you are one man in a million, Joe."

He went out to find a cab. It was beginning to rain, and before he succeeded in flagging down a vacant cab it was coming down in buckets and Malone was drenched.

"Pity poor sailors on a night like this," the driver sang out cheerfully as Malone stepped into the cab and gave him the address.

"This poor sailor's been busted for good," Malone came back.

"What for?" asked the driver.

Malone said, "For wearing green socks, I guess."

"Happens all the time," the cabby replied, and stepped on the gas.

Malone found von Flanagan waiting for him in the foyer. "Well," snapped the chief of homicide, "where is he? I've got the joint staked out. What's the set-up?"

Malone looked at his watch. "By now," he said, "either Jake Charlotte or Arthur Forstman should be showing up at Don Cass's apartment, whichever one is most anxious to buy off the missing witness. Whoever killed Harold Spruce because he was a witness to the accident will have just as much reason to try and buy off Don Cass."

"Or *bump* him off," von Flanagan put in.

"That's what you're here for," Malone replied. "To put the arm on him before he tries it. We'd better hide out now before he gets here."

"Wait a minute, Malone. I thought you said there were two, Jake Charlotte and this other guy—whom did you say it was? Forstman?" He paused and stared at Malone, the name ringing a bell in his mind for the first time. "Say, you don't mean F o r s t m a n! The millionaire, *Arthur* Forstman! Are you crazy, Malone? How does *he* figure in this?"

Malone gave von Flanagan a fast briefing on the case. "And now," he said, "we'd better get out of sight before they get here."

Kluchetsky and Scanlin were waiting in the chief's unofficial-looking car down the street. Malone piled in and they sat down to wait keeping an eye on the apartment house entrance for the arrival of Charlotte, Forstman—or both. Eight o'clock came, and passed. Eight five. Eight ten. Eight fifteen.

"Okay," Malone said, "maybe it didn't work. Let's go and have a look."

"Either you're pulling something," von Flanagan growled, "or Don Cass has run out on you."

"We'll see," Malone said.

They went back to the apartment house and rang Don Cass's doorbell. No answer. Malone

punched at the bell till the landlady came out.

"Looking for Mr. Cass?" she asked. She was as thin as a Saturday newspaper, and must have been born with a worried look, Malone reflected. "He must be in. I didn't hear him go out." She glanced at von Flanagan, who had never been able to shed his official look.

"No trouble at all," Malone said. "Mr. Cass may be able to give us some important details in an accident case. I assure you, Mrs.—?"

"Sheldon," the landlady said. She had relaxed a little. "Come on in. I'll show you his door."

Repeated knocking on the door brought no response. At a sign from von Flanagan Kluchetsky applied two hundred pounds of policeman to the door and it caved in. On the floor in a pool of blood they found Don Cass, his eyes vacantly staring.

Von Flanagan examined the body. "Dead as a doornail," he said. "Dead as a mackerel, dead as a—"

"Let's just say he's dead," Malone said. He turned to Mrs. Sheldon who was wringing her hands and seemed on the point of hysterics. "Pull yourself together, Mrs. Sheldon," he said, consolingly. "We know you didn't do it. Was anybody here to see Mr. Cass today?"

"He—he made a couple of phone calls," she replied weakly, pointing to the phone out in the hall. "I heard him. Then a man came to see him—an hour ago, maybe a little more."

Further questioning brought out no more than the fact that she had heard a man going up but that when she had stepped out into the hall he was already up the stairs and around the landing. She hadn't seen him, but apparently he had knocked on Don Cass's door, for Mr. Cass had let him in. She had heard Mr. Cass saying hello to the visitor. And that was all. She didn't hear the man go and assumed he was still there.

By this time Kluchetsky had the place practically apart, looking for clues. Scanlin was peeping into closets and desk drawers as if he expected the killer to be hiding in one of them.

Von Flanagan, after a brief examination pronounced the victim dead for the second time, this time adding insult to injury by making the enlightening observation that the deceased had been killed with the traditional blunt instrument.

Malone said, "Okay, that makes it official. Now—who was it? Jake Charlotte or Arthur Forstman? Or somebody who lost two bucks on Black Jet in the fifth at Hialeah."

"Black Jet came in and paid nineteen dollars," von Flanagan told him. "He's got the book on

him and if he wasn't a dead bookie now I'd have to take him in on a gambling charge. It wasn't a grudge killing and it wasn't a burglary." He held up the wallet he had taken from the victim's pocket, his lips set in tight lines.

Malone could see it was stuffed with bills to pay off the winning betters. Nineteen dollars of it would have gone to him, he reflected ruefully, and wondered if he could legally claim it, or just charge it up to expenses.

"One of them guys must have done it," von Flanagan went on. "Charlotte or Forstman. I'd better start checking on both of 'em right now."

An hour later, in von Flanagan's office, Malone heard the results of a police check-up. Arthur Forstman had been addressing a civic banquet at the time of Don Cass's murder. Three hundred alibis. So Forstman was in the clear. That left Jake Charlotte.

Malone rose and shook the cigar ashes off his vest.

"If you promise me you won't send your blundering flatfoot cops after him, and that you'll keep it out of the papers that Jake Charlotte is a suspect in the murder of Don Cass," he told von Flanagan, "I'll have the suspect in your hands by noon tomorrow." He made for the door without waiting for an answer.

X

A CALL TO Jake Charlotte's home brought Mrs. Charlotte hobbling to the telephone. She was still in a cast as a result of the accident. Mr. Charlotte, she told him, had left the house directly after dinner and hadn't returned yet. Was it something important? A settlement of the lawsuit? And if so, how much?

"Mr. Forstman hasn't named a figure yet," Malone told her, "but I've got a hunch the case is coming to a head and I've got to talk it over with Mr. Charlotte right away—tonight. When he gets in tell him to wait up for me. I'm coming right over."

It took the last of Joe the Angel's five dollars to pay off the cab driver at Jake Charlotte's door. It was an old frame house with a "modernized" pink stucco front that was already beginning to crack and blister. In the light of the street lamp it looked like something out of Dali in one of his most nightmarish moods. The living room light was on. Malone rang the doorbell.

Mrs. Charlotte's voice called out to him, "Come in, the door is open."

"I'm so worried about Jake," were the first words with which she greeted Malone. "It isn't like him to go off like this directly after dinner and not tell me what his plans are. And it's not like him to stay out so late.

He is a homebody, Jake is. Besides, he missed his favorite television program."

She was a matronly woman with the harried but still hopeful look that one finds at the cosmetics counter at a drugstore *One Cent Sale*. Her injuries were evidently quite as extensive as the insurance investigators had reported. But she had managed to give her hair a few hurried touches and make up her face for the visitor with her one good arm.

"I'm sure Jake will be along any minute now," she went on, to reassure Malone. "He *never* stays out this late. Can I offer you a cup of tea?"

Malone felt his gullet take a nose-dive into his solar plexus. His throat was acutely parched—like a camel's after a non-stop journey across the Sahara.

"No, thank you," he said politely. "Tea aggravates my neuritis. I could stand a drop of rye, though—or anything else you might have in the house," he added quickly.

Mrs. Charlotte looked over at him archly. "Well," she said, "if you promise not to tell Jake. He disapproves of liquor in the house. But I've got a bottle stashed away—if you don't mind getting it yourself. It's in the linen closet there, under the guest towels."

Malone made a beeline for the linen closet but before he was half way across the room there was a sound of the front door opening and he was barely back in his chair before Jake Charlotte entered the room.

Jake Charlotte looked, if anything, uglier and more unprepossessing than he had looked on his recent harried visit to Malone's office. If he was alarmed at finding John J. Malone in his living room he was trying not to show it.

He greeted the little lawyer with, "Well, well, it's nice seeing you again, Mr. Malone. You have some news about our lawsuit, of course. How much is he willing to settle for?"

But before Malone could answer Jake Charlotte had turned to his wife. "You shouldn't have stayed up so late," he told her. "You know it isn't good for you to lose sleep like this. Come now, I'll help you to your room. Mr. Malone will excuse you, won't you, Mr. Malone?"

By sheer force but with an outward show of gentleness he got his wife out of the chair and limpingly into the bedroom—very much as one would half-drag and half-coax a reluctant but submissive child. Two minutes later he was back, closing the bedroom door carefully behind him and winking at Malone as if to say, "There, that's done. Now we can talk freely."

Meanwhile Malone had been doing some fast thinking. If

Charlotte was guilty, and had given the sailor the lethal dose of chloral hydrate, and then had gone to Don Cass's house an hour before the appointment and murdered him with a blunt instrument to remove a second witness, then what would he not be prepared to do now? What would he not be prepared to do if he got wind of the fact that he was suspected of the crimes and that Malone had come at this late hour to deliver him over to the police for questioning?

Malone was beginning to wish he had told von Flanagan to let his cops make the arrest themselves. But after all, he reminded himself, there was still no direct evidence linking Jake Charlotte to either crime. Besides, the man was still his client and entitled to any legal protection he could give him.

Just the same he should have stopped off at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar and borrowed Joe's gun, or at the very least fortified himself with a double shot of rye. His throat by this time was feeling like the last days of a California drought and a dangerous fire hazard.

"My wife is the worrying kind," Charlotte said. "And she hasn't got any kind of a head for business. You know how women are."

"The kind I've known have a good head for business, all right," Malone said. "And the only worrying they do is where the next mink coat is coming from. I just dropped in to talk over the case with you." He was sparring for time, trying to decide just what line of questioning to take with Charlotte in order to smoke out the facts.

"I thought it might help to make a better settlement with Mr. Forstman if I could spring at least one good witness on him for our side," he went on quickly. "Do you think you could identify a witness if I produced one?"

Charlotte gave Malone a sly look, in which there was just the faintest trace of suspicion. "I guess I could identify a witness," he said, "if he was on our side. Who did you have in mind—and how much is it going to cost?"

"I don't know yet," Malone said. "I got a note in the mail a few days ago from somebody on North Clark Street, but I haven't been able to contact him. He left the house and hasn't been back since. I thought you might be able to give me a line on him. His name's Harold Spruce."

He saw Charlotte's face blanch and his hands flutter in a moment of panic. But only for a moment.

"The name don't mean a thing to me," Charlotte said, shaking his head. "I'd have to see the man. When you catch up with

him let me know and I'll come over to the office—" He paused. "It's getting cold in here. I could stand a little nip of something."

He rose and went over to a desk in the corner of the room and unlocked one of the lower drawers. "I've got to take it on the q.t.," he said, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "My wife disapproves of liquor." He disappeared into the kitchen where Malone heard him fiddling with ice cubes. "How will you have yours?" he asked, poking his head out of the kitchen door.

Malone's heart sank. "Thanks, but I don't ever touch the stuff," he said, remembering the sailor and the chloral hydrate. But when Charlotte returned he had a glass in his hand and another which he offered to Malone.

"You're kidding," he said. "Everybody knows John J. Malone never passed up a drink. Here, drink up."

Malone took the glass and set it down on the end table beside his chair. "Well, just a drop," he said, "when we've finished talking business. I've been tipped off that there's another witness—somebody who was waiting for a bus on the corner when the accident occurred." Malone was watching Charlotte narrowly as he spoke. "Somebody by the name of Cass—Don Cass."

The glass trembled in Charlotte's hand. He set it down and sank into a chair. There was a wary look in his eyes now. A hunted look. Malone decided to give it to him straight and braced himself for the next move.

"Don Cass is dead," he said. "And so is Harold Spruce. Somebody is bent on murdering all our witnesses. You wouldn't know who it is, would you, Mr. Charlotte?"

The words were barely out of his mouth before Charlotte was out of his chair and making for him with a knife he had picked up in the kitchen and concealed in his breast pocket.

Knife fighting was not in Malone's line. He had dealt in his time with guns, blunt instruments, and broken whiskey bottles. But a knife was something else again. Instinctively he dived for Charlotte's weapon hand, dodging the blow as he did so. But he missed and both men came down in a heap on the floor. Malone managed to kick out at the knife hand and this time the weapon went clattering across the floor.

He was up and on top of Charlotte before the latter could recover the weapon. But a vicious blow to the jaw made his head reel and he found himself pinned down under a rain of blows from Charlotte, who was fighting like a madman now.

Mrs. Charlotte had come hobbling out of the bedroom, and was screaming blue murder. Bells were ringing somewhere,

but whether they were doorbells, telephone bells or bells in his belfry Malone couldn't tell at the moment.

He had a firm grip on his assailant now, probably on the jugular, but he couldn't tell exactly. All he knew for certain was that he had to hold on because if he ever let go— Then there was a flash of fireworks in his head and suddenly everything went black.

When he came to again it was the face of Captain Daniel von Flanagan that swam into focus above him.

"Just take it easy," von Flanagan was saying, "all you need now is a stiff drink." He picked up the glass Malone had set down on the end table and held it out to the little lawyer.

Malone shook his head. "Take it away," he said, "and mark it exhibit A."

The Chief of Homicide turned to officer Kluchetsky. "You're a witness," he said. "This is the first time John J. Malone ever refused a drink. Remember that when the sanity hearing comes up."

The next day at the office, Maggie, between cold towels on his multiple swellings, bruises and contusions, plied the little lawyer with questions.

"Tell me this, Malone. If Harold Spruce was dickering with Arthur Forstman and Jake Charlotte, trying to sell his testimony as a witness to the highest bidder, why did he send a note to the police department offering to come forward and testify?"

"Harold Spruce was trying to bring pressure on both bidders," Malone said. "He figured that if they knew he had offered to talk they'd both get scared and up the ante. Jake Charlotte was up against it. He knew he couldn't compete with Forstman's millions, so he slipped Harold Spruce a lethal dose of chloral hydrate to get him out of the way. Which reminds me, is there anything in the emergency file?"

Maggie went to the filing cabinet and brought out a bottle of rye. "Joe the Angel sent this over when he heard you had met with—an accident," she said. "It's for internal use only."

"I can use it," Malone said, pouring himself a drink. "Have you heard from the police lab yet about that drink Jake Charlotte offered me last night?"

Maggie said, "Von Flanagan called up just before you got in. He said to tell you it was spiked with chloral hydrate. Enough to kill even a lawyer—and what he said about that I didn't wait to hear. I hung up. Anyway, it was a good thing he was having you shadowed and got there on time to save you from Charlotte, or—I don't even want to think what might have happened."

"I would have had him hog-tied and ready for delivery," Malone said, "if his wife hadn't conked me on the head with the table lamp." He laid aside the cold towels and got up to go. "I've got some unfinished business to attend to," he said. "If von Flanagan calls up again tell him I'll be over later to confer with my client."

Maggie gave him a sharp look. "Your client?"

At the door Malone turned. "Mr. Jake Charlotte," he said. "He's still my client, isn't he? And remember, I never lost a client yet."

"No," Maggie said, "but this time your client nearly lost you."

XI

At Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, Malone sat staring glumly into his drink and turning the situation over in his mind. The million dollar suit had gone glimmering, of course. All the money he could expect for defending Jake Charlotte probably wouldn't pay for the drink in front of him, let alone what he already owed Joe the Angel. And the rent was due. And Maggie's back pay, to say nothing of what he owed her in cash loans. Things had never looked so black before.

Joe was morose, but sympathetic. "Why did the guy have to go do things like that?" he said, shaking his head sadly. "And a mickey finn yet! It gives the saloon business a bad name."

"A million dollars," Malone brooded. "A cool million bucks —right out the window."

He was still brooding when he felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to find Arthur Forstman seating himself on the stool beside him.

"Your secretary told me I'd find you here," Forstman said. He took out his wallet, extracted five one thousand dollar bills, and laid them on the bar. "I promised to pay you five thousand to prove I was not the murderer," he said. "Here's your money. I'm sorry you got roughed up doing it."

Malone looked at the crisp thousand dollar bills. Joe the Angel was watching him, with a grin a mile wide, a grin that changed to a puzzled frown as Malone continued to stare at the bar. When Malone's hand went out to the money the grin returned to Joe's face, but only for an instant, for Malone was shoving the bills back to Forstman.

"I can't take it," he said. "I've already got a client, and I can't have two clients at one time."

Joe looked as if he was going to burst into tears.

"But I'll tell you what I *can* do," Malone said to Forstman. "I can steer you on to a hell of a good investment, and maybe

we can both make some money. Just maybe."

"That would be just fine with me," Forstman said. "I'm always open to a good business proposition."

"Then wait for me out in the car," Malone said, "and I'll join you in a few minutes."

When Forstman had gone Malone said to Joe the Angel, "Joe, I'm cutting you in on the investment, too. All you need to invest is ten bucks."

"What kind investment," Joe asked suspiciously. But at the same time he handed over the money.

Malone said, "I'm taking Arthur Forstman out to a floating crap game on upper Wabash Avenue. You'll get your money back. Besides, it'll be good to be among honest men again."

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the worst crime in the world

by . . . G. K. Chesterton

It's not too difficult to hide a corpse in an old castle and make a picture gallery exit. But Father Brown had a knowing eye.

FATHER BROWN was wandering through a picture gallery, with an expression that suggested that he had not come there to look at the pictures. Indeed, he did not want to look at the pictures, though he liked pictures well enough. Not that there was anything immoral or improper about those highly modern pictorial designs. He would indeed be of an inflammable temperament who was stirred to any of the more pagan passions by the display of interrupted spirals, inverted cones and broken cylinders with which the art of the future inspired or menaced mankind.

The truth is that Father Brown was looking for a young friend who had appointed that somewhat incongruous meeting-place, being herself of a more futuristic turn. The young friend was also a young relative; one of the few relatives that he had. Her name was Elizabeth Fane, simplified into Betty, and she was the child of a sister who had married into a race of refined but impoverished squires. As the squire was dead

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An astute critic once pointed out that during his lifetime Gilbert Keith Chesterton shared with Robert Louis Stevenson—R. L. S.—the unique distinction of being widely referred to by his initials alone. And it should hardly be necessary to add that the G. K. C. whose mastery of paradox made him a literary celebrity of the first magnitude further endeared himself to mystery lovers everywhere when he created Father Brown. And here is that peerless sleuth in one of his major triumphs—a dark castle mystery supreme.

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as well as impoverished, Father Brown stood in the relation of a protector as well as a priest, and in some sense a guardian as well as an uncle.

At the moment, however, he was blinking about at the groups in the gallery without catching sight of the familiar brown hair and bright face of his niece. Nevertheless, he saw some people he knew and a number of people he did not know, including some that, as a mere matter of taste, he did not much want to know.

Among the people the priest did not know, and who yet aroused his interest, was a lithe and alert young man, beautifully dressed and looking rather like a foreigner, because while his beard was cut in a spade like an old Spaniard's, his dark hair was cropped so close as to look like a tight black skull-cap.

Among the people the priest did not particularly want to know was a very dominant-looking lady, sensationally clad in scarlet, with a mane of yellow hair too long to be called bobbed, but too loose to be called anything else.

She had a powerful and rather heavy face of a pale and rather unwholesome complexion, and when she looked at anybody she cultivated the fascinations of a basilisk. She towed in attendance behind her a short man with a big beard and a very broad face, with long sleepy slits of eyes. The expression of his face was beaming and benevolent, if only partially awake; but his bull neck, when seen from behind, looked a little brutal.

Father Brown gazed at the lady, feeling that the appearance and approach of his niece would be an agreeable contrast. Yet he continued to gaze, for some reason, until he reached the point of feeling that the appearance of anybody would be an agreeable contrast. It was therefore with a certain relief, though with a slight start as of awakening, that he turned at the sound of his name and saw another face that he knew.

It was the sharp but not unfriendly face of a lawyer named Granby, whose patches of gray hair might almost have been the powder from a wig, so incongruous were they with his youthful energy of movement. He was one of those men in the City who run about like schoolboys in and out of their offices. He could not run round the fashionable picture gallery quite in that fashion; but he looked as if he wanted to, and fretted as he glanced to left and right, seeking somebody he knew.

"I didn't know," said Father Brown, smiling, "that you were a patron of the New Art."

"I didn't know that you were," said Granby. "I came here to catch a man."

"I hope you will have good

sport," answered Father Brown. "I'm doing much the same."

"Said he was passing through to the Continent," snorted the solicitor, "and could I meet him in this cranky place." He ruminated a moment, and said abruptly: "Look here, I know you can keep a secret. Do you know Sir John Musgrave?"

"No," answered the priest. "But I should hardly have thought he was a secret, though they say he does hide himself in a castle. Isn't he the old man they tell all those tales about—how he lives in a tower with a real portcullis and drawbridge, and generally refuses to emerge from the Dark Ages? Is he one of your clients?"

"No," replied Granby shortly. "It's his son, Captain Musgrave, who has come to us. But the old man counts for a good deal in the affair, and I don't know him; that's the point. Look here, this is confidential, as I say, but I can confide in you." He dropped his voice and drew his friend apart into a side gallery containing representations of various real objects, which was comparatively empty.

"This young Musgrave," he said, "wants to raise a big sum from us on a *post obit* on his old father in Northumberland. The old man's long past seventy and presumably will *obit* some time or other; but what about the *post,* so to speak? What will happen afterwards to his cash and castles and portcullises and all the rest? It's a very fine old estate, and still worth a lot, but strangely enough it isn't entailed. So you see how we stand. The question is, as the man said in Dickens, is the old man friendly?"

"If he's friendly to his son you'll feel all the friendlier," observed Brown. "No, I'm afraid I can't help you. I never met Sir John Musgrave, and I understand very few people do meet him nowadays. But it seems obvious you have a right to an answer on that point before you lend the young gentleman your firm's money. Is he the sort that people cut off with a shilling?"

"Well, I'm doubtful," answered Granby. "He's very popular and brilliant, and a great figure in society; but he's a great deal abroad, and he's been a journalist."

"Well," said Father Brown, "that's not a crime. At least not always."

"Nonsense!" said Granby curtly. "You know what I mean—he's rather a rolling stone, who's been a journalist and a lecturer and an actor, and all sorts of things. I've got to know where I stand. . . . Why, there he is."

And the solicitor who had been stamping impatiently about the emptier gallery turned suddenly and darted into the more crowded room at a run. He was running towards the tall and

well-dressed young man with the short hair and the foreign-looking beard.

The two walked away together talking, and for some moments afterwards Father Brown followed them with his screwed, short-sighted eyes. His gaze was shifted and recalled, however, by the breathless and even boisterous arrival of his niece Betty. Rather to the surprise of her uncle, she led him back into the emptier room and planted him on a seat that was like an island in that sea of floor.

"I've got something I must tell you," she said. "It's so silly that nobody else will understand it."

"You overwhelm me," said Father Brown. "Is it about this business your mother started telling me about? Engagements and all that; not what the military historians call a general engagement."

"You know," she said, "that she wants me to be engaged to Captain Musgrave."

"I didn't," said Father Brown with resignation, "but Captain Musgrave seems to be quite a fashionable topic."

"Of course we're very poor," she said, "and it's no good saying it makes no difference."

"Do you want to marry him?" asked Father Brown, looking at her through his half-closed eyes.

She frowned at the floor, and answered in a lower tone: "I thought I did. At least I think I thought I did. But I've just had rather a shock."

"Then tell us about it."

"I heard him laugh," she said.

"It is an excellent social accomplishment," he replied.

"You don't understand," said the girl. "It wasn't social at all. That was just the point of it—that it wasn't social."

She paused a moment, and then went on firmly: "I came here quite early, and saw him sitting quite alone in the middle of that gallery with the new pictures, that was quite empty then. He had no idea I or anybody was near; he was sitting quite alone, and he laughed."

"Well, no wonder," said Father Brown. "I'm not an art critic myself, but as a general view of the pictures taken as a whole—"

"Oh, you *won't* understand," she said almost angrily. "It wasn't a bit like that. He wasn't looking at the pictures. He was staring right up at the ceiling; but his eyes seemed to be turned inwards, and he laughed so that my blood ran cold."

The priest had risen and was pacing the room with his hands behind him. "You mustn't be hasty in a case of this sort," he began. "There are two kinds of men—but we can hardly discuss him just now, for here he is."

Captain Musgrave entered the room swiftly and swept in with a smile. Granby was just behind

him, and his legal face bore a new expression of relief and satisfaction.

"I must apologize for everything I said about the Captain," he said to the priest as they drifted together towards the door. "He's a thoroughly sensible fellow and quite sees my point. He asked me himself why I didn't go north and see his old father; I could hear from the old man's lips how it stood about the inheritance. Well, he couldn't say fairer than that, could he? But he's so anxious to get the thing settled that he offered to take me up in his own car to Musgrave Moss. That's the name of the estate. I suggested that, if he was so kind, we might go together; and we're starting tomorrow morning."

As they spoke Betty and the Captain came through the doorway together, making in that framework at least a sort of picture that some would be sentimental enough to prefer to cones and cylinders. Whatever their other affinities, they were both very good-looking; and the lawyer was moved to a remark on the fact, when the picture abruptly altered.

Captain James Musgrave looked out into the main gallery, and his laughing and triumphant eyes were riveted on something that seemed to change him from head to foot.

Father Brown looked round as under an advancing shadow of premonition; and he saw the lowering, almost livid face of the large woman in scarlet under its leonine yellow hair. She always stood with a slight stoop, like a bull lowering its horns, and the expression of her pale pasty face was so oppressive and hypnotic that they hardly saw the little man with the large beard standing beside her.

Musgrave advanced into the center of the room towards her almost like a beautifully dressed waxwork wound up to walk. He said a few words to her that could not be heard. She did not answer; but they turned away together, walking down the long gallery as if in debate, the short, bull-necked man with the beard bringing up the rear like some grotesque goblin page.

"Heaven help us!" muttered Father Brown, frowning after them. "Who in the world is that woman?"

"No pal of mine, I'm happy to say," replied Granby with grim flippancy. "Looks as if a little flirtation with her might end fatally, doesn't it?"

"I don't think he's flirting with her," said Father Brown.

Even as he spoke the group in question turned at the end of the gallery and broke up, and Captain Musgrave came back to them in hasty strides.

"Look here," he cried, speaking naturally enough, though

they fancied his color was changed. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Granby, but I find I can't come north with you tomorrow. Of course, you will take the car all the same. Please do, I shan't want it. I—I have to be in London for some days. Take a friend with you if you like."

"My friend Father Brown—" began the lawyer.

"If Captain Musgrave is really so kind," said Father Brown gravely, "I may explain that I have some status in Mr. Granby's inquiry, and it would be a great relief to my mind if I could go."

Which was how it came about that a very elegant car, with an equally elegant chauffeur, shot north the next day over the Yorkshire moors, bearing the incongruous burden of a priest who looked rather like a black bundle, and a lawyer who had the habit of running about on his feet instead of racing on somebody else's wheels.

They broke their journey very agreeably in one of the great dales of the West Riding, dining and sleeping at a comfortable inn, and starting early next day began to run along the Northumbrian coast till they reached a country that was a maze of sand dunes and rank sea meadows, somewhere in the heart of which lay the old Border castle which had remained so unique and yet so secretive a monument of the old Border wars.

They found it at last by following a path running beside a long arm of the sea that ran inland, and turned eventually into a sort of rude canal ending in the moat of the castle. The castle really was a castle, of the square embattled plan that the Normans built everywhere from Galilee to the Grampians. It did really and truly have a portcullis and a drawbridge, and they were very realistically reminded of the fact by an accident that delayed their entrance.

They waded amid long coarse grass and thistle to the bank of the moat, which ran in a ribbon of black with dead leaves and scum upon it, like ebony inlaid with a pattern of gold. Barely a yard or two beyond the black ribbon was the other green bank and the big stone pillars of the gateway. But so little, it would seem, had this lonely fastness been approached from outside that when the impatient Granby hallooed across to the dim figures behind the portcullis, they seemed to have considerable difficulty even in lowering the great rusty drawbridge. It started on its way, turning over like a great falling tower above them and then stuck, sticking out in mid-air at a threatening angle.

The impatient Granby, dancing upon the bank, called out to his companion: "Oh, I can't stand these stick-in-the-mud

ways! Why, it'd be less trouble to jump."

And with characteristic impetuosity he did jump, landing with a slight stagger in safety on the inner shore. Father Brown's short legs were not adapted to jumping. But his temper was more adapted than most people's to falling with a splash into very muddy water. By the promptitude of his companion he escaped falling in very far. But as he was being hauled up the green, slimy bank he stopped with bent head, peering at a particular point upon the grassy slope.

"Are you botanizing?" asked Granby irritably. "We've got no time for you to collect rare plants after your last attempt as a diver among the wonders of the deep. Come on, muddy or no, we've got to present ourselves before the baronet."

When they had penetrated into the castle they were received courteously enough by an old servant, the only one in sight, and after indicating their business were shown into a long oak-panelled room with latticed windows of antiquated pattern. Weapons of many different centuries hung in balanced patterns on the dark walls, and a complete suit of fourteenth-century armor stood like a sentinel beside the large fireplace. In another long room beyond could be seen through the half-open door the dark colors of the rows of family portraits.

"I feel as if I'd got into a novel instead of a house," said Granby. "I'd no idea anybody did really keep up the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' in this fashion."

"Yes, the old gentleman certainly carries out his historical craze consistently," answered the priest, "and these things are not fakes, either. It's not done by somebody who thinks all Medieval people lived at the same time. Sometimes they make up suits of armor out of different bits; but that suit all covered one man, and covered him very completely. You see it's the late sort of tilting-armor."

"I think he's a late sort of host if it comes to that," grumbled Granby. "He's keeping us waiting the devil of a time."

"You must expect everything to go slowly in a place like this," said Father Brown. "I think it's very decent of him to see us at all: two total strangers come to ask him highly personal questions."

And indeed when the master of the house appeared they had no reason to complain of their reception; but rather became conscious of something genuine in the traditions of breeding and behavior that could retain their native dignity without difficulty, in that barbarous solitude and after those long years of rustication and moping. The baronet

did not seem either surprised or embarrassed at the rare visitation; though they suspected that he had not had a stranger in his house for a quarter of a lifetime, he behaved as if he had been bowing out duchesses a moment before.

He showed neither shyness nor impatience when they touched on the very private matter of their errand; after a little leisurely reflection he seemed to recognize their curiosity as justified under the circumstances. He was a thin, keen-looking old gentleman, with black eyebrows and a long chin, and though the carefully curled hair he wore was undoubtedly a wig, he had the wisdom to wear the gray wig of an elderly man.

"As regards the question that immediately concerns you," he said, "the answer is very simple indeed. I do most certainly propose to hand on the whole of my property to my son, as my father handed it to me; and nothing—I say advisedly, nothing—would induce me to take any other course."

"I am most profoundly grateful for the information," answered the lawyer. "But your kindness encourages me to say that you are putting it very strongly. I would not suggest that it is in the least likely that your son would do anything to make you doubt his fitness for the charge. Still he might—"

"Exactly," said Sir John Musgrave dryly, "he might. It is rather an under-statement to say that he might. Will you be good enough to step into the next room with me for a moment?"

He led them into the further gallery, of which they had already caught a glimpse, and gravely paused before a row of the blackened and lowering portraits.

"This is Sir Roger Musgrave," he said, pointing to a long-faced person in a black periwig. "He was one of the lowest liars and rascals in the rascally time of William of Orange, a traitor to two kings, and something like the murderer of two wives. That is his father, Sir Robert, a perfectly honest old cavalier. That is his son, Sir James, one of the noblest of the Jacobite martyrs and one of the first men to attempt some reparation to the Church and the poor. Does it matter that the House of Musgrave, the power, the honor, the authority, descended from one good man to another good man through the interval of a bad one?

"Edward I governed England well. Edward III covered England with glory. And yet the second glory came from the first glory through the infamy and imbecility of Edward II, who fawned upon Gaveston and ran away from Bruce. Believe me, Mr. Granby, the greatness of a great

house and history is something more than these accidental individuals who carry it on, even though they do not grace it.

"From father to son our heritage has come down, and from father to son it shall continue. You may assure yourselves, gentlemen, and you may assure my son, that I shall not leave my money to a home for lost cats. Musgrave shall leave it to Musgrave till the heavens fall."

"Yes," said Father Brown thoughtfully. "I see what you mean."

"And we shall be only too glad," said Granby, "to convey such a happy assurance to your son."

"You may convey the assurance," said their host gravely. "He is secure in any event of having the castle, the title, the land and the money. There is only a small and merely private addition to that arrangement. Under no circumstances whatever will I ever see or speak to him as long as I live."

The lawyer remained in the same respectful attitude, but he was not respectfully staring. "Why, what on earth has he—"

"I am a private gentleman," said Musgrave, "as well as the custodian of a great inheritance. And my son did something so horrible that he has ceased to be —I will not say a gentleman— but even a human being. It is the worst crime in the world. Do you remember what Douglas said when Marmion, his guest, offered to shake hands with him?"

"Yes," said Father Brown.

" 'My castles are my king's alone, from turret to foundation stone,' " said Musgrave. " 'The hand of Douglas is his own.' "

He turned towards the other room and showed his rather dazed visitors back into it.

"I hope you will take some refreshment," he said, in the same equable fashion. "If you have any doubt about your movements, I should be delighted to offer you the hospitality of the castle for the night."

"Thank you, Sir John," said the priest in a dull voice, "but I think we had better go."

"I will have the bridge lowered at once," said their host.

In a few moments the creaking of that huge and absurdly antiquated apparatus filled the castle like the grinding of a mill. Rusty as it was, however, it worked successfully this time, and they found themselves standing once more on the grassy bank beyond the moat.

Granby was suddenly shaken by a shudder. "What in hell was it that his son did?" he cried.

Father Brown made no answer. But when they had driven off again in their car and pursued their journey to a village not far off called Graystones, where they alighted at the inn of the Seven Stars, the lawyer learned with a

little mild surprise that the priest did not propose to travel much farther; in other words, that he had apparently every intention of remaining in the neighborhood.

"I cannot bring myself to leave it like this," he said gravely. "I will send back the car, and you, of course, may very naturally want to go with it. Your question is answered; it is simply whether your firm can afford to lend money on young Musgrave's propects. But my question isn't answered; it is whether he is a fit husband for Betty. I must try to discover whether he's really done something dreadful, or whether it's the delusion of an old lunatic."

"But," objected Granby, "if you want to find out about him, why don't you go after him? Why should you hang about in this desolate hole where he hardly ever comes?"

"What would be the use of my going after him?" asked the priest. "There's no sense in going up to a fashionable young man in Bond Street and saying: 'Excuse me, but have you committed a crime too horrible for a human being?' If he's bad enough to do it, he's certainly bad enough to deny it. And we don't even know what it is. No, there's only one man that knows, and *may* tell, in some further outburst of dignified eccentricity. I'm going to keep near him for the present."

And in truth Father Brown did keep near the eccentric baronet, and did actually meet him on more than one occasion, with the utmost politeness on both sides. For the baronet, in spite of his years, was very vigorous and a great walker, and could often be seen stumping through the village and along the country lanes.

Only the day after their arrival Father Brown, coming out of the inn on to the cobbled marketplace, saw the dark and distinguished figure stride past in the direction of the post office. He was very quietly dressed in black, but his strong face was even more arresting in the strong sunlight; with his silver hair, swarthy eyebrows and long chin he had something of a reminiscence of Henry Irving or some other famous actor.

In spite of his hoary hair, his figure as well as his face suggested strength, and he carried his stick more like a cudgel than a crutch. He saluted the priest, and spoke with the same air of coming fearlessly to the point which had marked his revelations of yesterday.

"If you are still interested in my son," he said, using the term with an icy indifference, "you will not see very much of him. He has just left the country. Between ourselves, I might say fled the country."

"Indeed," said Father Brown with a grave stare.

"Some people I never heard of called Grunov have been pestering me, of all people, about his whereabouts," said Sir John, "and I've just come in to send off a wire to tell them that so far as I know he's living in the Poste Restante, Riga. Even that has been a nuisance. I came in yesterday to do it, but was five minutes too late for the post office. Are you staying long? I hope you will pay me another visit."

When the priest recounted to Granby his little interview with old Musgrave in the village, the lawyer was both puzzled and interested.

"Why has the Captain bolted?" he asked. "Who are the other people who want him? Who on earth are the Grunovs?"

"For the first, I don't know," replied Brown. "Possibly his mysterious sin has come to light. I should rather guess that the other people are blackmailing him for it. For the third, I think I do know. That horrible fat woman with yellow hair is called Madame Grunov, and that little man passes as her husband."

The next day Father Brown came in rather wearily, and threw down his black bundle of an umbrella with the air of a pilgrim laying down his staff. He had an air of some depression. But it was as it was so often in his criminal investigations. It was not the depression of failure, but the depression of success.

"It's rather a shock," he said in a dull voice, "but I ought to have guessed it. I ought to have guessed it when I first went in and saw the thing standing there."

"When you saw what?" asked Granby impatiently.

"When I saw there was only one suit of armor," answered Father Brown.

There was a silence during which the lawyer only stared at his friend, and then the friend resumed.

"Only the other day I was just going to tell my niece that there are two types of men who can laugh when they are alone. One might almost say the man who does it is either very good or very bad. You see, he is either confiding the joke to God or confiding it to the devil. But anyhow he has an inner life. Well, there really is a kind of man who confides the joke to the devil. He does not mind if nobody sees the joke; if nobody can safely be allowed even to know the joke. The joke is enough in itself, if it is sufficiently sinister and malignant."

"But what are you talking about?" demanded Granby. "*Whom* are you talking about? Which of them, I mean? *Who* is this person who is having a sinister joke with his Satanic Majesty?"

Father Brown looked across at

him with a ghastly smile. "Ah," he said, "that's the joke!"

There was another silence, but this time the silence seemed to be rather full and oppressive than merely empty; it seemed to settle down on them like the twilight that was gradually turning from dusk to dark. Father Brown went on speaking in a level voice, sitting stolidly with his elbows on the table.

"I've been looking up the Musgrave family," he said. "They're a vigorous and long-lived stock, and even in the ordinary way I should think you would wait a good time for your money."

"We're quite prepared for that," answered Granby, "but anyhow it can't last indefinitely. The old man is nearly eighty, though he still walks about, and the people at the inn here laugh and say they don't believe he will ever die."

Father Brown jumped up with one of his rare but rapid movements, but remained with his hands on the table, leaning forward and looking his friend in the face.

"That's it," he cried in a low but excited voice. "That's the only problem. That's the only real difficulty. How will he die? How on earth is he to die?"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Granby.

"I mean," came the voice of the priest out of the darkening room, "that I know the crime that James Musgrave committed."

His tones had such a chill in them that Granby could hardly repress a shiver; he murmured a further question.

"It was really the worst crime in the world," said Father Brown. "At least, many communities and civilizations have accounted it so. It was always from the earliest times marked out in tribe and village for tremendous punishment. But anyhow I know now what young Musgrave really did and why he did it."

"And what did he do?" asked the lawyer.

"He killed his father," answered the priest.

The lawyer in his turn rose from his seat and gazed across the table with wrinkled brows.

"But his father is at the castle," he cried in sharp tones.

"His father is in the moat," said the priest, "and I was a fool not to have known it from the first when something bothered me about that suit of armor. Don't you remember the look of the room? How very carefully it was arranged and decorated? There were two crossed battle-axes hung on one side of the fireplace, two crossed battle-axes on the other. There was a round Scottish shield on one wall, a round Scottish shield on the other. And there was a stand of armor guarding one side of the

hearth, and an empty space on the other.

"Nothing will make me believe that a man who arranged all the rest of that room with that exaggerated symmetry left that one feature of it lopsided. There was almost certainly another man in armor. And what has become of him?"

He paused a moment, and then went on in a more matter-of-fact tone:

"When you come to think of it, it's a very good plan for a murder, and meets the permanent problem of the disposal of the body. The body could stand inside that complete tilting-armor for hours, or even days, while servants came and went, until the murderer could simply drag it out in the dead of night and lower it into the moat, without even crossing the bridge. And then what a good chance he ran!

"As soon as the body was at all decayed in the stagnant water there would sooner or later be nothing but a skeleton in fourteenth-century armor, a thing very likely to be found in the moat of an old Border castle. It was unlikely that anybody would look for anything there, but if they did, that would soon be all they would find. And I got some confirmation of that. That was when you said I was looking for a rare plant; it was a plant in a good many senses, if you'll excuse the jest.

"I saw the marks of two feet sunk so deep into the solid bank I was sure that the man was either very heavy or was carrying something very heavy. Also, by the way, there's another moral from that little incident, when I made my celebrated graceful and cat-like leap."

"My brain is rather reeling," said Granby, "but I begin to have some notion of what all this nightmare is about. What about you and your cat-like leap?"

"At the post office today," said Father Brown, "I casually confirmed the statement the baronet made to me yesterday, that he had been there just after closing-time on the day previous—that is, not only on the very day we arrived, but at the very time we arrived. Don't you see what that means? It means that he was actually out when we called, and came back while we were waiting; and that was why we had to wait so long. And when I saw that, I suddenly saw a picture that told the whole story."

"Well," asked Granby impatiently, "and what about it?"

"An old man of eighty can walk," said Father Brown. "An old man can even walk a good deal, pottering about in country lanes. But an old man can't *jump*. He would be an even less graceful jumper than I was. Yet if the baronet came back while we were waiting, he must have come in as we came in—by jumping the

moat—for the bridge wasn't lowered till later.

"I rather guess he had hampered it himself to delay inconvenient visitors, to judge by the rapidity with which it was repaired. But that doesn't matter. When I saw that fancy picture of the black figure with the gray hair taking a flying leap across the moat I knew instantly that it was a young man dressed up as an old man. And there you have the whole story."

"You mean," said Granby slowly, "that this pleasing youth killed his father, hid the corpse first in the armor and then in the moat, disguised himself, and so on?"

"They happened to be almost exactly alike," said the priest. "You could see from the family portraits how strong the likeness ran. And then you talk of his disguising himself. But in a sense everybody's dress is a disguise. The old man disguised himself in a wig, and the young man in a foreign beard. When he shaved and put the wig on his cropped head he was exactly like his father, with a little make-up.

"Of course, you understand now why he was so very polite about getting you to come up next day here by car. It was because he himself was coming up that night by train. He got in front of you, committed his crime, assumed his disguise and was ready for the legal negotiations."

"Ah," said Granby thoughtfully, "the legal negotiations! You mean, of course, that the real old baronet would have negotiated very differently."

"He would have told you plainly that the Captain would never get a penny," said Father Brown. "The plot, queer as it sounds, was really the only way of preventing his telling you so. But I want you to appreciate the cunning of what the fellow did tell you. His plan answered several purposes at once. He was being blackmailed by these Russians for some villainy; I suspect for treason during the war. He escaped from them at a stroke, and probably sent them chasing off to Riga after him. But the most beautiful refinement of all was that theory he enunciated about recognizing his son as an heir, but not as a human being. Don't you see that while it secured the *post obit,* it also provided some sort of answer to what would soon be the greatest difficulty of all?"

"I see several difficulties," said Granby, "which one do you mean?"

"I mean that if the son was not even disinherited, it would look rather odd that the father and son never met. The theory of a private repudiation answered that. So there only remained one difficulty, as I say, which is prob-

ably perplexing the gentleman now. How on earth is the old man to die?"

"I know how he ought to die," said Granby.

Father Brown seemed to be a little bemused, and went on in a more abstracted fashion.

"And yet there is something more in it than that," he said. "There was something about that theory that he liked in a way that is more—well, more theoretical. It gave him an insane intellectual pleasure to tell you in one character that he had committed a crime in another character—when he really had. That is what I mean by infernal irony; by the joke shared with the devil. Shall I tell you something that sounds like what they call a paradox?

"Sometimes it is a joy in the very heart of hell to tell the truth. And, above all, to tell it so that everybody misunderstands it. That is why he liked the antic of pretending to be somebody else, and then painting himself as black—as he was. And that was why my niece heard him laughing to himself all alone in the picture gallery."

Granby gave a slight start, like a person brought back to common things with a bump.

"Your niece," he cried. "Didn't her mother want her to marry Musgrave? A question of wealth and position, I suppose."

"Yes," said Father Brown dryly, "her mother was all in favor of a prudent marriage."

The tragic dilemma of a whittling ex-cotton picker adds a new dimension to Justice—and the famed author of TOBACCO ROAD *scores an outstanding short-story triumph*

IT'S AGAINST THE LAW

By ERSKINE CALDWELL

By the shores of a lazy sea on the Florida Gold Coast murder occupies separate bedrooms while a dear old lady has the best interests of absolutely everyone at heart

LET HER KILL HERSELF

A complete new short novel

By RUFUS KING

in the next SAINT

ghost of a chance

by . . . Frederick Nebel

A hotel room corpse and a murder that looked like suicide gave Donahue some bad moments. But his big problem was to stay alive.

DONAHUE PULLED open a side door of the *Hotel Coronet* and came into the arcade with a gust of raw wind that kited the long skirt of his blue ulster round his rangy legs. He went swinging on past smart shops towards the lobby, one hand pocketed, the other rapping a newspaper against his thigh at each step. He wore a gray hat well off his face, its band conspicuously water-stained.

As he neared the lobby entrance, he heard the sound of Cuban music at the *thé dansant* in the Flamingo Room and picked up the tune with a whispered whistling. He reached the lobby and was cutting diagonally across towards the elevator bank when Phalen, the *Post Express* legman, turned from trying to date the brunette at the cigar counter and called out:

"Hey, look at Handsome."

"Poison in your soup, Red," Donahue said cheerfully, on his way.

Phalen tossed a wise-eyed wink at the brunette, popped a

Life has a curious way at times of cascading over well-worn rocks like a sun-dappled waterfall, without tempestuous interludes or excitement of any kind. Then it can erupt into sudden violence. Few crime fiction writers can match aces and spades with Frederick Nebel in his weather-eyed alertness to such violence or trump the deck of his writing talents. Here's tough Dick Donahue to prove his point—with a shoulder holster bulge to his ulster-clad bulk.

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cigarette butt into a sand-filled urn and set off after Donahue.

"What's the rush, Donny?"

"Date."

"Who is she?"

"What's the matter; did little beautiful at the counter give you the air?"

Phalen was pacing him. "Me, I'm her everything, chum." His thin face was the color of sand and it was dry like sand. His smile was slow, twisted, and his eyes were sharp, brazen, and he had a dandified way of wearing his clothes. He spoke glibly: "No kidding, Donny. I've been trying for hours to stir up news."

"So what?"

"So news is where you are, usually. You wouldn't kid me, would you, pal?"

They stopped in front of the elevator bank and Donahue said in a mock-confidential voice, "Keep it under your hat, Red, but"—he put a hand significantly alongside his mouth—"there's a blonde upstairs who doesn't want to be alone."

One of the elevator doors opened and Donahue swiveled away from Phalen and strode into the car.

"I mean," Phalen said, following, "on the level."

Donahue chuckled with rough good humor, and said, "Don't be a horse's neck, Red," and straight-armed him out of the car. And to the elevator boy, "Shoot me up, will you?" And when the car had started—"Five."

Number 545 was at an L in the corridor and Donahue used a small bronze knocker shaped like a crouching cat. In a moment the door was opened by a short, heavy-set man dressed in a dark, speckled-gray lounge suit. He was holding a pair of rimmed nose glasses chest high, and with a slight inquisitive dip of the head he said:

"Mr. Donahue?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Come right in."

Donahue entered a small foyer and laid his hat on a small table there. He saw, beyond, through the Lancet arch, a girl standing sidewise to him. Her chin was tilted upward and she was peering into a small vanity mirror and adjusting a brimless dark hat. She wore a three-quarter length black lapin coat, and as Donahue followed the middle-aged man into the large living-room, she made a quarter turn, gave him a brief, hesitant smile of greeting and turned again to her mirror.

The middle-aged man led him to a far corner of the room and said: "Pardon me just a moment, Mr. Donahue."

Donahue nodded, unbuttoned his overcoat and stood gazing down on to the boulevard below. There were several apartment houses and a tall, lean hotel across the street. He heard the

man and the girl talking in the foyer but did not catch what they said; he did not try. The sound of the door being opened and closed was followed shortly by the man's return.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Donahue."

"Not at all, not at all, Mr. Loftman."

"There; take a seat, please; that one, any one."

He looked fifty-odd and wore his snow-and-iron hair like a plume, unparted. His clothes were loose, sacklike, but obviously expensive, and when he replaced his glasses upon his nose he looked scholarly and a little older.

He said: "I've had occasion to use other branches of your agency and found them all dependable. That's why I telephoned you to come over. What I really want this time, however, is a messenger. I wanted to get you here and make tentative arrangements with you. The messenger is not to be sent yet, but when the time comes I want to be certain of having him ready—instantly—to board a plane for the East. He will fly, meet my wife at a bank I shall name. She will turn over to him a certain amount of money and he will fly back with it and deliver it to me at this hotel."

Donahue leaned forward. "It might be simpler and less expensive for you to have it wired here."

Loftman gazed down absently at his unlit cigarette. "Possibly you don't care to undertake it?"

"It was just a suggestion. I can have a man on call, any time you say. There's always at least one man on reserve. No retainer's necessary."

Loftman rose. "Within the next twenty-four hours I shall know definitely. You say there is always someone at the agency?"

"Night and day. And if you want to speak to me personally, they can always locate me, any hour."

"Good, I'll telephone you."

Loftman stepped back, tossed his unlit cigarette into a tray, put his heels together and dipped his big head.

Donahue went towards the foyer saying, "Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Loftman."

He picked up his hat from the table and made his way out into the corridor. As he was walking away from the closed door he heard hurrying footsteps and turned to see Phalen coming towards him rapidly. Behind Phalen, slower-gaited, was Bickford, the house officer.

Phalen jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "Blondie want to be alone again?"

"Funny, you are," Donahue muttered, taking long strides.

"Blondes are the curse of the working classes, Donny."

"One of the curses of my life is a red-headed legman with a nasty mind."

"No fooling, pal. Is there anything in the wind? I'll do right by you in the paper."

Bickford caught up with them and said in a hoarse, grave voice, "Hello, Mr. Donahue."

"Hello, Mr. Bickford," Donahue said, and they all got in the elevator and rode down to the main floor.

Phalen poked Bickford in the arm and said, "Donny's a pain in the neck. Ever know that, Bick?" as they left the elevator.

The house officer wore a neutral stare. Phalen sauntered off towards the cigar counter and then Bickford turned to Donahue and said, "Mr. Donahue, could I have a few words with you?"

"Sure thing."

Bickford jerked his shiny bald head. "My office."

When they were seated in his small cubbyhole, Bickford planted his hands on his broad knees and stared gravely down between them.

"I don't want to pry in your business, Mr. Donahue, but could I just ask you if you think the 545 business is okey?"

"What do you mean—okey?"

"Well, sir, I mean, whatever the business is, it won't make a stink in the hotel, will it?"

Donahue chuckled. "I think not. It's just a matter of messenger service. No tailing, no shadowing."

Bickford let go a large sigh. "Well, I'm glad to hear that," he said, but still looked a little troubled. "Because that 545 caused us a headache a couple of days ago. It was on the fourth, the day before Loftman checked in." He shrugged. "It's a job, keeping monkeys out of this hotel, Mr. Donahue.

"You see—and this is under the hat, Mr. Donahue. I seen a couple of guys in the lobby from time to time and I got to wondering about their faces. They were down in the register as Herbert Gearman and P. T. Lancaster, but that didn't mean a thing. So finally I shot over to Headquarters and went over the mugs there. And sure enough—they were Marty O'Fallon and Jess Fauls, a couple of con men and gamblers and a lot of other things, with a record longer than a coast-to-coast railroad ticket.

"So I got McCartney from Headquarters — he's a good friend of the house here—and we walked in on O'Fallon and Fauls and Mac said, 'I'll give you birds just fifteen minutes to pack up.' They tried to stall but Mac planted himself right in the living-room and they had to pack. Well, we didn't want any notoriety here in the hotel and Mac said the best thing to do would be put 'em on a train. Which we did. We made 'em

pack and then Mac walked 'em over to the station and made 'em buy tickets all the way to California. And he stayed there till the train pulled out. It was a close shave but with the help of Mac we did well."

"But what makes you sorry about the new tenant?" asked Donahue.

Bickford sighed. "Just an idea, I guess. Just the kind of goofy idea a guy gets sometimes. I guess it was seeing a private dick coming out of there so soon after this other mess." He slapped his knees. "Well, thanks, Mr. Donahue; thanks."

"If I thought there was anything wrong, I wouldn't touch it —and I'd tell you."

"That's the way I figure. Has this—um—Red Phalen anything against you?"

Donahue shrugged. "I just tossed him out of my office once for trying to pull a fast one on my files. He probably once read a book about how reporters have the free run of the town and it went to his head."

Bickford nodded. "I have trouble with him myself sometimes."

"Oh, Red's all right," Donahue said, going towards the door, "except when he gets in your hair."

Bickford raised a forefinger. "Don't give him any dope on what I told you, Mr. Donahue."

Donahue chuckled. "I won't even give Red the right time," he replied, backing out of the office.

"Wouldn't you, pal?" said Phalen, leaning against the corridor wall. His expression was not pleasant.

Donahue pivoted. He went on his way saying, "Go roll your hoop, nuisance."

II

DONAHUE went to a Greek place in Sixth that night for dinner. The walls were covered with large photographs of wrestlers and boxers; a famous Italian tenor; a television crooner. There was one of those pianos that work when you feed it nickels.

Sam came over to the table and said jovially, "Hello, Mr. Donahue. What will you have?"

"A double Martini, steak, French fries, tomatoes and salad."

"Okey, Mr. Donahue."

Donahue spent half an hour over the food, another half hour over Turkish coffee and brandy and a long heavy cigar. He looked lean, smooth, in a blue serge suit, his face well-shaved, a bit hawkish, beneath the hard black sheen of his hair. As he was leaving Sam gave him a brandy on the house and plucked a piece of lint off the back of his overcoat.

Outside, there were two cabs at the curb. The nearest had its

engine purring and Donahue got in, slammed the door behind him, said: "The hockey games," and sank back into the seat.

It was a ride of ten minutes. He was early and went around to the lavatory, and he was standing in a corner lighting a cigarette when he felt a hard object thrust against the small of his back. His eyes flicked upward at the bare wall, he finished lighting the cigarette and let the match fall.

"Spill it," he said, raising his hands half-way.

"That's very clever. You're Donahue, ain't you?"

"I'm Donahue."

"Donahue the private cop?"

"Sure."

"I thought so."

"Who are you, the big man from the South?"

"Keep your face to the wall, Donahue! And skip the funnies!"

Donahue, his cigarette between his lips, inhaled, let the smoke lag from his nostrils. He stood straight, well-planted on his feet, looking even a little debonair.

"I'm keeping my face to the wall."

"The door's latched," the low, stern voice went on. "I latched it. So don't try to stall thinking someone'll come in."

"Who's stalling? If you've got something on your mind, get it off. I don't want to miss the games."

"You'll miss the games, handsome, if you don't talk. What were you doing in 545 at the *Coronet?*"

Donahue inhaled languidly, though he did not feel languid. He said offhand, "Who sent you —that pup Phalen?"

"Never mind who sent me! I asked you—"

"I heard what you asked me. What did Phalen pay you, fifty bucks? Or could he raise fifty bucks?"

A crack on the back of his head made his teeth shake and he pressed his eyelids close together, wincing. He swayed a trifle and the cigarette fell from his lips.

"That's just the barrel of it, Donahue. The muzzle's used for something else."

Donahue made himself sway a little more. He made his legs break at the knees and let himself fall against the wall.

"Snap out of it!" the voice behind him rasped.

"Ugh," said Donahue.

When he was half-way down the wall, his body looking limp and useless, he felt the man's hand tussle with his shoulder. Donahue suddenly shot one foot backward and threw himself down to his knees. He connected. But instantly the lights went out and he figured that he had driven the man against the light switch. He heard the man groaning, heard feet scraping on the floor.

He drew his gun, swiveling

on his knees and trying to get a bearing by the sounds the man made. His gun was cocked and he felt wide awake, tight-drawn. Then there was a moment's silence during which the man apparently made no move. Donahue continued to remain motionless, on his knees, sitting back on his heels.

Then he heard a loud click and instantly the door was flung open, dim yellow light poured in. Donahue caught a glimpse of an overcoated shape diving out through the doorway. Donahue raised his gun but in that moment the fleeing man collided with two others. There was a short, violent tangle of bodies.

Donahue let down the hammer of his gun, shot to his feet and lunged towards the door. The overcoated man had broken away and vanished, and Donahue, piling through the door, got tangled up with the two men who had tried to enter the lavatory before. They made no attempt to fight with him, but they simply were unable to get out of the way.

Donahue finally broke between them, leaped for the lobby and found himself wading through the crowd there like a man trying to run in water.

When he reached the street, hundreds of men and women were arriving. He stopped, his eyes dagger-sharp and whipping about in all directions. But he had not seen the man's face, he had only a vague idea of what the man looked like from the rear. After a moment he relaxed.

He took his hat off, reset the crown, placed it back upon his head. He dusted off his overcoat, his knees, popped a cigarette from his leather case and lit up. It had all the earmarks of the kind of thing Phalen would do: send a gunman after him to get information. Yet Donahue knew that he could not successfully point the finger at Phalen. You have to have evidence.

On his way from the hockey games, Donahue dropped in at the *Casa Caliente*. He tossed hat and overcoat on to the checkroom desk, pushed aside black drapes and made his way around the edge of the dining and dancing room to the bar. The bar was situated in a long, open alcove, two steps up from the main room.

"Hello, Mr. Donahue," the barman said. "Been around to the games?"

"Yeah. Scotch, Julius, with soda on the side."

"Was the games good?"

"Swell."

Julius turned to get the Scotch and a syphon and Donahue turned to hang his elbows on the bar, prop his back against it. Walter Hazen, the owner, came up and said: "Haven't seen you in a long time, Donny."

They shook hands and Dona-

hue said, "Just don't get around too often, Walt. By the way, who's that girl over there?"

Hazen turned. "Which?"

"Walking across the dance-floor."

"Search me. Maybe I can fix—"

"Uh-huh. I just asked."

His drink was ready and he turned around, poured the Scotch into the glass of iced soda and jigged the glass swizzle stick. He ate some potato chips and finished half the drink at a swallow. Julius was showing him a new match trick when the girl climbed on to a high stool beside him. Both looked at each other at the same time and the girl smiled.

"Hello," she said frankly, warmly.

"Greetings."

Julius picked up his matches and went down to the other end of the bar.

"See what you did," Donahue said. "He'll pout now."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Buy you a drink?"

"Oh, no; no, thanks."

She turned to regard him with a shy little smile twitching at her lips. He wasn't looking at her; he was hunched over the bar making wet circles with the bottom of his glass.

But presently she said towards the side of his face: "About—this afternoon . . ."

He looked at her. "Huh?"

"I—I hope you didn't think anything wrong."

"About what?"

"I mean—well, the way it happened. The way you walked in and found me primping and then the way I went out. He's forgetful about those things, though—about introducing people. But he's a dear old man."

"Oh, that. I hadn't thought of it." He finished his drink and beckoned to the barman. "Do it again, Julius."

Julius reached for his matches.

"The drink, I mean," Donahue said.

Julius looked disappointed.

The girl blushed a little and said: "I guess I was foolish to speak to you this way. But what did you think when you saw me there?"

He raised his palms, looked at her. "I tell you I didn't think anything." He had to laugh at her earnestness.

She regarded him curiously. "Don't you care what people think of you?"

"Of course not."

"But don't you think it might help sometimes if a person thought good of you rather than bad?"

"Listen," he said, pretending to slump, "maybe we'd better dance."

A man, a tall, very young man in dinner clothes, came up and said: "Pardon me," to both of them; and to the girl, "We did

not know where you'd gone, Fern. Isn't this my dance?"

She slid off the stool, leaned over and said close to Donahue's face: "It matters sometimes," in a grave, anxious whisper.

He put his glass to his lips and over the rim of it watched her walk off with the tall young man. The young man had pink cheeks, wavy golden hair.

Donahue turned to Julius. "Know that girl was sitting here?"

"Nah. The guy with her is Judge Emmett's son. I thought you knew her."

Donahue raised his drink. "I do," he lied. "I was just asking you."

He left the bar and headed for the lounge and was putting his scarf round his neck when Phalen came in with a couple of other legmen and three girls. The crowd was pretty high and Phalen, gesturing flamboyantly, shouted:

"M'gawd, gals, look! It's Handsome himself!" And then: "Look out, gals. Get within ten feet of that maiden's prayer and you're lost. Lost!"

A little straw-blonde cried plaintively: "I wanna get lost!"

"Did you say ten feet?" another asked, plucking at Phalen's sleeve. "I want to make sure."

Walter Hazen came through the black drapes and said, "Please, not so loud, not so loud."

"Go hang your neck, Walt," Phalen called to him.

Donahue had his hat and coat on by this time and, drawing on his gloves, he was detouring towards the door, and looking none too happy.

The little straw-blonde cried, "O-o-o-o, you big handsome mans!"

Phalen lurched between Donahue and the door, screwing up his face. "Too good for us, hey?"

"Look out, Red."

"Too almighty good for us, hey?"

"Beat it, Red; you're plastered."

"Hah! Big, young, successful private dick too good to 'sociate with working boys and girls, huh?"

Donahue, still drawing on his gloves, raised his chin towards the other two legmen and said: "Take it before I do something with it, boys."

They swayed over and grabbed hold of Phalen. "Come on, Red; cut it out," one urged. "Walt'll think we're drunk and—"

"Lemme at him," Phalen cried, his eyes blazing.

The two legmen held on to him.

Donahue said over their heads: "See you sometime, Walt," and went out, closing the heavy door quietly.

"Ran away!" Phalen exulted. "He couldn't take it!"

"Ah, my big brave star reporter!" one of the girls cried.

III

DONAHUE went to court next day, to testify in an insurance fraud case, and when he got back to the office, at three-thirty, Miss Laidlaw looked up from her typewriter.

"Lieutenant Kelly McPard telephoned about ten minutes ago and asked if you would kindly come over to apartment five hundred forty-five, the *Coronet*."

Donahue stopped getting out of his overcoat and asked, "What'd he say?"

She moved prim precise lips. "Just that you should come over."

He shrugged his shoulder back into his overcoat and stood looking quizzically, a little darkly, at the surface of his secretary's desk. Louie, the office boy, was methodically stamping envelopes.

Then Donahue said: "I'll be there if anyone calls," and left the office.

He went downstairs and looked up the line for a street car. There was none in sight, so he flagged a taxi and rode out towards the West End. Donahue got out of the taxi near the Park and took the front entrance into the *Coronet*.

He went past the desk, caught an upbound elevator and got off at the fifth floor. The long skirt of his ulster slapped his calves as he swung long legs down the corridor. He knocked on 545 and a uniformed policeman opened the door, saying:

"Oh, hello, Mr. Donahue."

Donahue did not remember his name, so he just said, "Hello," and passed from the foyer into the living-room. A couple of policemen were standing about, and across the room, at the entrance to the bedroom, there was a group of men gathered behind a police photographer, who was taking a picture of the bedroom. A doctor was shoving things into a black satchel.

Phalen was standing on his toes, peering over the photographer's shoulder. Plain-clothed Kelly McPard was taking neat little drags at a cigarette, and when he turned to knock some ash into a tray, he saw Donahue and raised his eyebrows, smiled. Donahue moved his chin upward, in greeting, and then McPard left the others and came across the room.

He was a tall man, and pretty stout, but the dark tailormade clothes he wore lessened the effect of his stoutness. His pale hair was neatly slicked down and he had a round, pink face; but nose, eyes and mouth seemed concentrated over a very small portion of it. His eyes were

shrewd and at the same time genial. White, starched cuffs crowded his plump, pink hands.

"I break into your routine, Donny?"

"Not at all, Kel," Donahue replied, his eyes fastened on the group at the bedroom door.

Kelly McPard smiled and nodded towards the partly open pantry door and Donahue followed him into a small, rectangular room, tiled, and fitted with an electric refrigerator, a porcelain sink and a high white porcelain stool. McPard drew the door shut. He pressed his cigarette into the sink and it sizzled briefly against the wet.

"I hear you were up here yesterday, Donny."

Donahue sat on the stool, propped his heels on the metal foot-rest and leaned comfortably back against the wall. He nodded.

"What did Loftman want?" McPard asked, his voice quiet, unhurried.

"He wanted us to send a messenger East. It wasn't definite at the time I saw him. He just wanted to make sure we'd have a man on call."

"Messenger, what for?"

"To fly there, get some cash from his wife and fly back here with it."

"How much?"

"He didn't mention the amount."

"What was he doing here?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

McPard leaned over to look at the polished tips of his pointed black shoes. "Just what were the conditions?"

"There weren't any. Everything was tentative. Details were to be given when he decided definitely our man'd fly."

"Did he phone again after you saw him?"

"Nuh-huh."

McPard wagged his head. "This looks like a funny one, all right."

There was a knock on the door and McPard opened it and a policeman said: "Doc wants to see you a sec, Lieutenant."

McPard walked out, leaving the door open, and Donahue, sitting on the stool, frowned down his nose. In a minute Gus Lankford, McPard's partner, thrust his dark, rawboned face through the doorway and said:

"When'd you get in?"

"Minute ago."

"What you been doing, Donny, getting mixed up in murder?"

"Me mixed up?"

Lankford had a loud foghorn laugh. "You're a one for getting mixed up in things, Donny! Boy, if you ain't a one! I never seen the like . . . What, was this here now Loftman hiring a bodyguard?"

"The whole agency, Gus."

"Red says you was kidding him about a blonde."

"Yeah. Just to pass the time."

"It's like my wife always says — Hey, what'd you think! My new kid began walking last night! Did I tell you?"

"Great, Gus."

"Took four steps and then flat on his face!"

Phalen came up and said over Lankford's shoulder in a voice that was not apologetic: "They said I was trying to smack you last night, Donny. Sorry. I guess I was stinko."

"That's okey, Red," Donahue said; and then to Lankford, "what did the medical examiner say?"

"Instantaneous!" Lankford boomed, his eyes popping. "A blunt instrument . . ." He tapped his left temple. "He musta been laying there for two hours. It was the hotel maid found him. She come in with some clean towels and there he was laying in the bedroom." He added a slab of gum to some already in his mouth and his big, knobby jaw moved from side to side. "Kel says—"

Kelly McPard called him and Lankford turned and walked across the living-room, a bony scarecrow of a man with deep hollows behind his ears. Kelly McPard addressed him, using small, nimble-fingered gestures.

Donahue wandered into the living-room as the doctor and the police photographer left. A minute later two precinct detectives came out of the bedroom and headed for the corridor door after the manner of men who knew definitely where they were going.

A uniformed sergeant and a couple of patrolmen were still in the bedroom, and Phalen was bent over the television, dialing it, while the loudspeaker rasped, squawked.

"Sh, sh," Kelly McPard said.

"I was trying to get the Rhythm Twins," Phalen explained. "They're friends of mine."

Donahue thought he heard a knock on the corridor door. He was nearest, so he stepped into the foyer, opened the door and looked down into the face of the girl. Before she could open her mouth he said:

"You'd better beat it."

"But I just wanted to—"

"Beat it." She didn't know yet. "Later—later."

He closed the door in her face and strolled back into the living-room.

"Was that somebody?" Kelly McPard asked.

"No."

Lankford had gone into the bedroom again.

"Listen, Donny," McPard said, smiling persuasively, "you sure that's all took place between you and Loftman?"

"That's all, Kel."

McPard nibbled on his lower lip. "The man's had at least a two and a half hours start. The

clerk gave a pretty good description of him and I've notified all air lines, train terminals and bus lines. Far as I can figure out, he left his baggage behind—one suitcase."

"Who?"

"Loftman, Loftman."

Donahue brought his lips together and swung his gaze towards the bedroom door.

Phalen went past saying, "Well, I've got to buzz off." The door slammed behind him.

Lankford came back into the living-room planting his feet slowly and heavily, his hands behind his back, his head lowered and a mournful scowl on his face. Then he threw his arms outward, let them flop back to his sides.

"Well," he said heavily, impressively, "that's life: here today, gone tomorrow, and the devil takes the hindermost. They tell me Bickford was a good egg, a hard-working house dick. Tough. I hear he has a wife or a mother or something over in Terre Haute, Indiana. He comes from Terre Haute, Indiana.

"I was there once, the time I was contradicting Goo-Goo Dorshinsky, for murder. Goo-Goo won four bucks offa on the ride back, playing poker. I had a awful time with Goo-Goo's wife the day the State gives him the works. I sits up with her all night account of she wanted to commit suicide. It takes me just eleven hours to talk her out of it. Six years ago. She always sends me a Christmas card."

IV

Miss Laidlaw's horn-rimmed spectacles were large and her thin, triangular face was small. Her eyes were calm. Her neat, flat haircomb carried out the motif of her prim lips, her chaste dress, her large low-heeled shoes. She was shadowlike and competent.

"It all sounds very involved, Mr. Donahue," she said. "I don't see any reason why the agency should meddle with it. After all, Mr. Loftman didn't really engage you, and he is not on our files. Therefore, since you asked me, I think you ought to leave well enough alone."

He sat in a deep brown study. "It's clearly a police job," he said.

She nodded primly. "Of course. If you don't think the girl is actually involved, it would be unfair to mention the fact that she was there. I hate the way newspapers like to involve pretty women in these things."

"You and me both." He sat up, leaned on his elbows, frowned down at his big strong hands. "It was just an impulse that made me send her away. Part of the impulse, I guess, was because I didn't want her to see Loftman all smashed up. At the time, of

course, I thought it was Loftman who was dead. I think that was the main part of the impulse." He picked up a pen, began signing correspondence.

Miss Laidlaw returned to her office, closing the connecting door. But a minute later she opened it, to say: "Mr. Phalen."

"I'm busy," he said.

"Yes, sir."

She closed the door but after a moment opened it again and shrugged. "He says it's of vital importance."

Donahue sat back. "Okey," he sighed wearily.

Phalen strolled in wearing a sly, insinuative smile. He shut the door with a backward kick and said, "Was she really a blonde, Donny?"

"D'you know only one joke, Red?"

"I mean, was she really?"

Donahue clasped his hand behind his head. "Go ahead, Red; get it off your chest."

Phalen threw a small, neatly folded handkerchief onto the desk and sat down. "Exhibit number what?" he said, with exaggerated complacency.

Donahue did not remove his hands from behind his head. He glanced casually at the handkerchief, then up at Phalen. He didn't say anything and his face showed a large lack of interest.

Phalen gestured languidly. "Pick it up. Look at it. Go ahead. It won't bite."

Donahue picked it up, looked at it, saw the initials FC on it and then tossed it negligently back to the desk. "Now go on from there, Red."

"I think maybe it's your move now."

"Are you going to horse around or are you going to tell me why you came in here?"

Phalen chuckled dryly. "You know, the funny thing about it was that I thought you really were kidding about some woman. That's you all over: a guy never knows whether he's coming or going with you. Where does the blonde fit in, Donny?"

"You're still horsing, Red."

Phalen leaned forward and said intimately, "Listen, Donny; you've always had me wrong. You could never take a joke. Just because one time I thought it would be a great laugh to take some information from your files, why"—he looked astonished—"you're down on me for life. We could do a lot for each other. I could help you and you could help me."

"I'll worry along solo, Red."

"That's where you're wrong. You never know. Look, I could have taken this handkerchief right around to Kelly McPard. But did I? No. I wanted to be a right guy. I brought it to you."

"Why me?"

"Now *you're* horsing. Over the apartment, while I was fiddling around with the television

trying to get the Rhythm Twins —friends of mine—you went to the door. When you came back in the living-room Kel asked you if anyone had knocked and you said no."

Donahue nodded.

Phalen went on: "I picked up this handkerchief as I left the apartment. It was lying just outside the door. It wouldn't have been there five minutes before some cops went out and one of them would have seen it and picked it up. It was during that time you went to the door, when Kel thought he heard a knock." Phalen pointed. "There was a dame out there, Donny. I'll eat my hat on it!"

"Eat it."

"I haven't told Kelly anything about it. I haven't said a word about it." He laid his hand on the desk, palm upward. "I came here to put my cards on the table. Why be an Airdale?"

"You came here figuring to get in on the ground floor."

"All right; say I did, say I did. I'm still giving you a break. If I was a wrong guy, I'd have run to Kel in the first place."

Donahue shook his head. "No you wouldn't've." He leaned forward. "Kel's in the dark. You think I'm in the know. Kel couldn't have given you anything. You think I can. That's why you came here, Red, like a Greek bearing gifts."

"Horsefeathers!"

"When you're sober, Red, you make a good show at liking me. When you're tight, the truth comes out."

"Ah, hell, a guy tight is liable to say anything."

"Anything he means, yes."

Phalen jumped up and snarled, "Okey, have it your way! But you'll trade, sweetheart, or"—he scooped up the handkerchief —"I'll bounce this in Kelly's lap!"

Donahue put his hands behind his head again. "I've nothing to trade, Red. Just because you pick up a woman's handkerchief in a hotel corridor, you get ideas."

"What a sweet liar you are!" He thrust the handkerchief out at arm's length. "Do you or don't you?"

"I wish I could, Red, but I can't. I've got nothing."

Phalen jammed the handkerchief into his pocket and went out like a blast of ill wind.

After a minute, Miss Laidlaw came to stand primly in the connecting doorway. "You're too generous, Mr. Donahue, to even let that man inside your door."

Donahue's forehead was wrinkled darkly with thought. "Maybe I should have told him—but it stuck in my throat. I hate that guy, I guess."

Donahue lived in a two-room apartment on the South Side. There was a small kitchenette and sometimes he made his own breakfast, but not often, and

sometimes, when some boys came in to play poker, he made steak sandwiches, late at night.

He was lying on the divan at eleven that night, with newspapers strewn about him, when the telephone rang. He got up and went into the bedroom and unhooked the instrument.

"This is—is me," she said.

"What's the matter now?"

"I—I'm in a drug-store around the corner. Could I see you a few minutes here?"

"What's the matter with my apartment?"

"Well . . . all right."

"Four-one-four. You run the elevator yourself."

He hung up and wandered into the bathroom, where he splashed cold water in his face and ran a comb through his hair. Going to the bedroom again, he put on an old robe. Then he went into the kitchenette, put ice and a jigger of bourbon into a tumbler and sloshed in ginger ale.

The buzzer sounded and, carrying the drink to the door, he let her in. She had on the black lapin coat again but a different hat. Before he had quite closed the door behind her, she said in a breathless voice:

"I—I heard the late news bulletins on the radio."

He extended his hand towards an armchair. "Sit down."

She sat down and then he crossed to the divan and made the newspapers crackle beneath his weight. He let the hand holding the drink hang between his knees and he regarded her curiously but not anxiously. He was patient, and took a few sips at his glass.

Sitting on the edge of the chair, with her ankles crossed, she was not at ease and her face was flushed from what apparently was a combination of an inner excitement and the cold out-of-doors. It made her look very attractive in a fresh, wholesome way, like frost in the early fall.

"I understand now," she said, nodding, looking gravely at him, "what you meant when you chased me away from the apartment door."

He was candid: "I thought it was Loftman."

She did not understand quite what he meant and her eyebrows lifted.

"I mean," he said, "I thought it was Loftman was dead."

"Did you send me away because you thought I had something to do with it?"

"I just did it on an impulse. Besides"—he shrugged—"I didn't think it would be pleasant, seeing him."

She clasped her hands together and a shudder, hardly perceptible, passed over her body. "I'm a little afraid," she said.

He looked down into his glass and did not ask why.

She looked frankly at him. "I mean, I'm afraid of being in-

volved in this. Not that I'm guilty of anything. I just—well—you know . . ." She inhaled, then let out a little sigh, and then she was thoughtful for a moment, her eyes downcast; but presently she said: "I came to ask if anything had been found out since—" She made a little gesture which indicated "the crime."

"I don't know," he replied, still looking down into his glass. "The police may have found something, but I'm not in on it."

Her eyes lay gravely on him. "Did you tell them about me?"

He shook his head.

"I had to see you," she told him earnestly. "I wanted to know where I stood. I thought you might have told the police. What puzzles me, though, is your apparent total lack of curiosity about all this."

He bent his brows and walked up and down the room. "I don't see why I should get steamed up about it. I don't want to get mixed up in the case because there's no reason why I should. I don't think you're in any way involved in the criminal angle of it, because if you were, you wouldn't have popped up outside the apartment door yesterday."

"But they insinuate Mr. Loftman is a murderer! I can't, I can't believe it!"

He said: "You can't blame the police. They find the house dick dead in Loftman's apartment. They don't find Loftman. So naturally they draw conclusions. It's human nature."

She stood up. She stood very straight, like an athlete, though you felt she was not athletically inclined. "Tomorrow," she said, "if nothing turns up, will you work for me?"

He looked at her.

"I mean," she explained, "as a detective. I haven't much money but I imagine I can pay you. Will you try to find out where Mr. Loftman is?" And then she asked immediately, "Does a private detective have to reveal everything to the police, if he works for a client?"

"It's about like a lawyer and his client. Only we've got to use a little more discretion and we like to have faith in the client."

"Have you sufficient faith in me?"

He stood spread-legged, gazing down at the floor. He felt a sharp personal angle creeping into things. He could not help liking the girl, she was so deadly in earnest. And yet more than anything he wished to keep his hands off this case, he wanted to know as little as possible about it, for he felt that somehow, sometime, he might have to tell the police that she was acquainted with Loftman. And he had already burned a couple of bridges.

"Well, I'm sorry," she said.

in a slightly injured voice, and started towards the door.

"No. Wait a minute. I was just thinking." He paused and looked at the back of her head. "Suppose we wait until tomorrow. I guess we can do something about it."

She turned and said gravely, "But you've got to have faith in me first."

"I have," he said.

There were male voices in the hall and an instant later a knock on the door. Donahue raised a finger to his lips. He took hold of the girl's hand and walked her swiftly, silently into the kitchenette, and pointed to a door about two feet square in the lower part of a white cupboard.

"That's for service delivery," he explained. He opened the door, revealing a square compartment whose back was another door. "That one leads to the hall. Wait about a minute, then move that snaplock back and crawl out. Close the door again."

She was anxious. "What's the matter?"

"Police, I think."

V

DONAHUE turned, stepped back into the living-room and closed the kitchenette door. They were knocking again. He rumpled his hair and then walked noisily to the corridor door. It was Kelly McPard. Lankford was with him.

"Wake you up, Donny?" McPard asked with polite concern.

Donahue was rubbing his eyes. "I guess I fell asleep. Come in."

As they walked in, Lankford craned his long neck and said in his loud, foghorn voice, "Nice place you got here, Donny."

"Sit down," Donahue said. "Drinking? I've got nothing but bourbon."

McPard held up thumb and forefinger, close together, and sighted between them. "Just a wee drop."

"Same here," Lankford said.

"Straight?"

They nodded and sat down and Donahue brought in the bottle, glasses and some ginger ale for a chaser. Both detectives took full measure and Donahue took a short one.

"Well, happy days," Kelly McPard said, and they all downed the drinks neat and then McPard dabbed at his lips with a large, snowy handkerchief.

Lankford turned to him and said with hoarse approval, "Donny always did have swell liquor."

McPard nodded towards Lankford in polite agreement, while the expression on his face suggested that his thoughts were up another alley.

"Well, we haven't got anywhere, Donny," he said, leaning sidewise and thrusting his hand-

kerchief back into his hip pocket. "Looks as if it's going to be a nut to crack and we haven't a ghost of a chance of cracking it. We had all trains, buses and planes covered and we even checked up in these drive-a-car-yourself places. Not a peep.

"This Loftman was down on the *Coronet* register as from Greenwich, Connecticut, but we checked through and there's no Henry W. Loftman in the Greenwich directory. That in itself is a swell beginning, I don't think so."

McPard sighed. "A few days ago Bickford got McCartney to toss out a couple of con men by the name of O'Fallon and Fauls. It was under the hat, of course, though when this murder happened Mac told me all about it and said it was the same apartment."

"Bickford told me about it," Donahue said. "He saw me coming out of five hundred forty-five and asked me if I thought Loftman was a square guy. I said I thought he was."

McPard said: "I don't for a minute think there's any connection between those two con men and Loftman, because Mac ran them smack out of town. I think it's just coincidence that this five hundred forty-five figures twice in a row. To my way of thinking, Bickford was still up in the air about the O'Fallon and Fauls scare, and when he saw you come out of Loftman's suite, why, he began to wonder.

"Maybe he sneaked in there while Loftman was out and was rooting around in Loftman's baggage when Loftman came back in. He wouldn't know right offhand Bickford was the house dick and maybe he pasted him right off the bat. Then maybe he found out who Bickford really was, got panicky and ran out. If he had something to conceal, this would be natural. And the fact that we can't locate his name in Greenwich seems to show it was an alias, and if it was an alias then you've got to conclude that he had something to conceal. Don't you think so, Donny?"

"It sounds reasonable."

McPard leaned forward, elbows on knees, and regarded the polished tips of his pointed black shoes.

"Red thinks maybe there was a blonde mixed up in it after all. He thought at first you were kidding. But then he changed his mind."

Donahue went around the room looking for a cigarette. He found one and stood in the center of the floor, lighting it.

McPard stood up, kicking the creases free of his knees. "Red says he thinks there was a blonde at the apartment door the time I asked you if someone knocked and you said no." He took his hand out of his pocket. "Red found this woman's handkerchief

outside the door a couple of minutes afterwards."

Donahue nodded. "He tried to sell it to me first, for a beat. When I told him he was screwy, he ran it over to you."

Lankford looked indignantly at McPard. "Red didn't tell us that, Kel."

McPard slipped the handkerchief back into his pocket, smiled ruefully to himself. "But Red's pretty certain—"

Donahue whipped his cigarette into an empty metal waste basket. Sparks showered upward and he blurted out, "Red seems to be your prize stool!"

Lankford raised a hand. "Now don't get sore, Donny. Kel was just remarking—"

"Kel's remarks are beginning to annoy me like hell!"

Lankford looked with long-faced regret from one to the other.

Dull red color had seeped into Donahue's cheeks and a dark, sultry look was in his eyes.

"Well, now we done it, Kel," Lankford sighed hoarsely. "When he gets sore, he gets stubborn as a mule."

Kelly McPard nodded regretfully.

Donahue pointed in the general direction of downtown. "That legman thinks every crime has to have a chemise in it and you guys play along with him like a couple of half-baked potatoes!"

McPard made gentle, placatory gestures. "Sh, now, Donny; sh!"

Donahue swiveled, said: "I'm going to bed," and strode into his bedroom, slamming the door.

"Now he'll blow up any time you just look at him," Lankford said morosely.

McPard sighed. "Well, I guess we may as well go, Gus."

Lankford nodded and they went out together and rode down in the elevator in silence.

Five minutes later Donahue opened the bedroom door. At the same time the kitchenette door opened and the girl stood there, not on her toes, yet seeming to be poised. Her eyes were warm, disturbing.

"I—I heard it," she said.

He was biting his lip and he didn't say anything. She ran across the room, took hold of his hand impulsively, said in a warm, rushing whisper, "You're grand—grand!" There was no smile on her face, but a rich, a wide-open expression, pathetically ingenuous.

He muttered, "I just got sore."

Her eyes hurried anxiously back and forth across his face and she gripped his hand harder. "You ought to know my name. Do you realize you don't? It's Fern Chester and I live with a maiden aunt—Bethia Samson—at twenty-six Westminster Road."

He was darkly preoccupied,

but he said, "I knew it was Fern something."

She suddenly wilted away from him, grimacing. "But I know, I know you're getting into something you don't want to. And I got you to do it. Why don't you just throw me out and tell them—tell the police?"

She ran to a chair and sat down on the edge of it, her toes turned in, her hands clasped between her knees and a wet look in her harried eyes.

He regarded her stoically for the space of a minute—he still looked preoccupied—and then suddenly he took a few long strides, picked up a chair and slapped it down in front of her. He sat down and said point-blank:

"We may as well get down to business. I've stayed out of it as long as I can. Personally I'm not curious, but the agency's not mine, I only work for it, and the home office is pretty tough. They've got a reputation they're proud of. I can go just so far with the cops, but there's a limit. I can't clown around with them any longer unless I get some details from you. Kelly McPard is beginning to bear down on me and there's a certain newspaperman in town would like to see me take water."

"I'm sorry," she said in a small, plaintive voice.

"Loftman's suspected of having committed a crime. You believe he didn't do it, but that doesn't really count."

"I know, I know," she grimaced. "I feel I want to tell you certain things. I feel you ought to know certain things and I feel I can trust you. How far can I trust you?"

"You've got to leave that to my judgment. I don't know yet what you know, so I can't make any promises. I'm not one of these rich amateur detectives you read about. I work for a living and I work for an agency that allows its district men a lot of leeway but lands on 'em like a ton of brick if there's an unhappy ending. Do I understand that you're not personally involved in this—I mean criminally?"

She started. "Of course not."

"All right. Then I'll promise that I'll keep you out of the limelight if it's humanly possible. Is that what you want?"

"That was one of the things—the least, really, I suppose, when you get right down to it."

"What else?"

"Well" — she dropped her eyes— "I made a promise to Mr. Loftman."

He lit a cigarette and said offhand: "What's his real name?"

She stared miserably at the floor. "That's what I promised: that I wouldn't tell his real name."

"If you're sure he's not guilty, what does it really matter?"

"Oh, it's not that. He was in the city under an assumed name for business reasons, but I don't know what they were."

"How do you know then that his so-called business reasons were not really criminal reasons?"

"Because I've known him a long time. He knew my father and mother and when they died he took care of their affairs and what little money was left. The money lasted until I was about eighteen and I had to go to work. He gave me a job in his office and I soon became his secretary and worked for him a little over three years.

"Then my Aunt Bethia came into a little money and asked me if I would like to come out and live with her and take charge of the house. That was two years ago, and I came out. He and I corresponded from time to time and then he wrote me that he was coming out and that he would like me to call on him. So then you saw me at his hotel apartment. He'd told me he was expecting a Mr. Donahue, but we kept talking and talking and I didn't get away before you arrived."

"Did he ask you pointblank not to divulge his real identity?"

"He said, 'Fern, under no circumstances whatever tell anyone I'm here. Or that I was here, after I go. I'm on a secret business mission and I expect to be here only a day or two longer, when I'll return to New York.' "

"Did he mention any local names?"

"He didn't mention any names at all. I—" She paused, then began again, "I saw—" and then stopped, troubled.

"Come on, come on."

"Well, I happened to see a memorandum on his desk. He'd written the name Flannigan on it, and an address. But I don't remember the address. After a while, after I was there a while, he tore the memo into bits. He didn't act guilty or troubled or anything like that."

Donahue squinted at her. "What's his real name?"

The hunted look in her eyes deepened and she looked up at him imploringly. "Marcus Rathbun. He used to be a congressman."

Donahue stared intently at her for a long moment, then rose and murmured, "Um," and walked thoughtfully about the room.

She cried: "A lot of important men use assumed names sometimes."

"Of course, of course," Donahue nodded. "There's no harm in that—except when a thing like this crops up."

She slumped where she sat, bit her lips and looked very miserable again.

"Red would break his neck over this," Donahue said, but only half aloud and more to him-

self than to the girl; but then instantly he said to her, "You'd better beat it home now." And, as she rose, "What business is he in?"

"He's a director of the Centaur International Engineering Company. You can see," she cried desperately, "that he wouldn't be a man to go about killing people, hotel detectives!"

"Flannigan was the other name, huh? Any initials?"

She shook her head, then said: "Will you have to tell the police now?"

He was candid: "I may have to. But I think I can keep you out of it." He smiled down into her troubled eyes. "I'll try."

"I believe you."

He said cheerfully: "Well, just take it easy," and walked with her to the door.

"I guess I do imagine things are worse than they are."

"Sure, sure you do," he said, feeling that actually things looked pretty bad. "I'll give you a ring tomorrow."

When she said good night there was a mixture of embarrassment and warm thankfulness in her manner; the clasp of her hand was warm and close and a little disturbing.

"I—I feel I've known you a long time," she said, and then instantly blushed.

He grinned. "I hope I won't have to let you down."

She turned and hurried away and he stood in the doorway, watching, until she disappeared in the elevator.

VI

GRAY DAWN was outside the window when the ringing of the telephone bell roused Donahue. His bedroom was in semi-darkness and, sleepy-eyed, he groped around for a while, yawning, before he found the instrument and drew it into bed with him.

"Hello," he said, on the tail end of a noisy yawn; and then: "Don't you ever sleep? . . . Sure you woke me up . . . Well, I don't care about worms . . . I'll bite: what?" He listened and presently he sat upright. "Says who? . . . All right, go ahead; I'm listening." He listened for two minutes, motionless. Then he said in a dropped voice, "I'll be right over," and hung up.

He washed and dressed in ten minutes, and went out. There was no taxi in sight, so he walked across to a bus line and then walked eastward until he heard a bus coming. He boarded it and it was cold too and the only other passengers were three laborers with metal lunch boxes. They sat staring dolefully into space.

It was a ride of twenty minutes. Donahue got off in the heart of the business district and walked south. Pretty soon he was out of the business district. He passed some warehouses, an

empty parking lot, a row of drab rooming houses, a Greek restaurant. The smell and the feel of the river were near. The light in the east was lifting slowly over the rooftops. In an alley a man was making a lot of noise with ashcans.

Donahue turned a corner and saw, a few yards beyond, a couple of police cars and an ambulance drawn up to the curb. A narrow, three-storied red brick house was sandwiched in between a garage and a pool hall, and in front of the house a uniformed policeman was standing. A weatherbeaten sign hung alongside the door; it said: *Furnished Rooms.*

"Looking for somebody?" the policeman asked.

"The lieutenant phoned me."

"Upstairs—all the way."

Donahue climbed. Some people were standing in the second-floor hallway, gossiping in low voices. Some wore bathrobes in which they huddled. One man wore drooping trousers and a long-sleeved undershirt. The gossiping died down as Donahue drew nearer. They looked aside—or towards him, but covertly. A few electric bulbs lit the way and there was the smell of plaster that had been damp a long time. The banister was black and did not slide smoothly beneath the hand.

When Donahue reached the top-floor hallway, he saw several policemen standing outside an open doorway. One called into the room beyond, "I guess here comes Mr. Donahue."

Donahue stopped in the doorway of a small, dilapidated room. He saw a uniformed sergeant, a couple of policemen, the ambulance doctor, Kelly McPard and Lankford, and a man named Stratford, from the District Attorney's office. They made a crowd in the small room.

"Thanks for coming," McPard said. He beckoned with his finger. "Can you identify him?"

Donahue shouldered his way to the side of a large, lumpy bed. On it lay the man he had known alive as Loftman. Loftman lay quite peacefully, quite naturally, as though he slept. His skin had a peculiar pinkish tinge.

"Loftman?" McPard asked.

Donahue turned and nodded.

McPard tossed a tagged key into the air, caught it deftly. "We thought so, account of the hotel key, but we wanted to make sure."

"How long's he been dead?"

"Offhand"—McPard nodded towards the ambulance doctor—"about since the night of the day Bickford was killed. Monoxide." He moved across the room, wedging his way through the group, and pointed to a small coal stove.

"This did it, Donny." McPard pointed upward, where the stove pipe careened far to one side, disconnected from that chimney

hole. "The coal gas couldn't get up the chimney."

"Accident?"

"Ha!" laughed Lankford hoarsely.

McPard toed some crumpled, sooty newspapers that lay on the floor. "These were stuffed in that hole," he said. He withdrew a torn piece of newspaper from his pocket and extended it towards Donahue. "Take a look at this, Donny."

Donahue stood beneath the single electric bulb and peered down at an item which was encircled by a pencil marking. The caption said:

Coal Gas Kills Sleeping Youth

The account went on to say that one John Leffler, aged twenty, a houseboy in the employ of Ferdinand Ashmun, of Blue Ridge Road, was found dead in bed of carbon monoxide poisoning. The supposition was that in shaking down the stove before going to bed he had jarred loose the stove pipe. No one else was in the house at the time. The Ashmuns had gone to Phoenix. There was furnace heat throughout the house, expect in the room occupied by Leffler. In this room there was a small coal stove. The body was discovered when paperhangers, who arrived next morning to redecorate several rooms, received no response to the doorbell and notified the police.

Donahue turned the piece of paper over, gazed down abstractedly at an advertisement, then handed it back to McPard.

"We found it in his pocket," McPard said.

Donahue said: "Power of suggestion, huh?"

"That's all we found," McPard continued. "No identification. Except the hotel key."

Lankford b o o m e d goodnaturedly, "You sure pick swell clients, Donny! Boy, you sure pick 'em!"

"From what I hear," the District Attorney's man said caustically, "you've been doing plenty of shadow boxing around town."

Donahue turned. "Oh, hello, Mr. Stratford."

"Didn't you hear what I said?"

Donahue looked around the room. "What am I, on the carpet or something?"

"I just thought," McPard said, in his friendly way, "you'd want to have a look. He came here the other night with a woman. The old man who runs this place said he met them at the front door and the woman hung in the background. Loftman asked for a room for a week and the old man took them up to this one. He's very near-sighted and he didn't pay much attention to the woman. The room was all right and they didn't have any baggage, so Loftman paid a week in advance.

"The old man brought up some kindling and some coal for the stove, and that's the last he saw of them. He came up next

day about ten, to bring some towels and make the bed, but there was no answer. He thought they were out and tried to use his own pass key, but there was a key in the other side of the door. He tried once again, later, in the afternoon, but still no luck. So he gave it up, I guess.

"Then this morning, at five, a drunk wandered in and wanted a room and the old man brought him up to this floor and gave him one, up front. He stopped to listen at this door and then he tried his key again, he was beginning to get curious, but the key was still in the other side. He began to get worried, so he went downstairs, got a screwdriver and went in the next room. He'd screwed shut that connecting door sometime ago. So he took the screws out, opened the door—and there you are."

Stratford snapped, "Kel says he thinks Loftman was using an alias."

"That's what Kel told me," Donahue nodded.

"Maybe Loftman told you his real name."

Donahue shook his head.

"The thing is," Stratford rasped, "find the woman." He looked sharply at Donahue. "It's highly possible you'd know her."

"Maybe—but I don't."

"I'd like to be sure of that."

"Try hard."

"You talk like a guy with a pretty swell opinion of himself."

Donahue turned to Kelly McPard and said: "Did you get me down here to take a lot of guff from him?"

"You'll take it and like it!" Stratford ripped out.

Kelly McPard patted down the troubled air with his plump hands. "Now, Mr. Stratford, please don't let us get worked up so early in the morning. Donny probably hasn't had his breakfast yet and it is kind of an imposition to drag a man out of bed at dawn—"

"Have I had my breakfast?" demanded Stratford.

McPard rolled his eyes ceilingward.

"Besides," Stratford hammered on, "you were the one gave me this long spiel about what Red Phalen thought and what you thought."

"Sure, sure," said McPard placatingly. "I like to keep all my cards face up with the D. A.'s office. But it's just that if you rub Donny the wrong way he goes off the handle."

Stratford snapped peevishly, "You're not so considerate of most guys you drag in that favorite back room of yours."

"Now listen here, now," Lankford barged in, goggle-eyed. "That ain't fair. Besides, Mr. Donahue ain't no mugg. And have I had my breakfast yet? No! And did I pound the floor half the night with my new kid? Yes!

And am I getting on my high horse? No!" he roared.

"Sh, sh, Gus," Kelley McPard implored.

Stratford muttered under his breath, turned his face into a corner and folded his arms.

"Well, Donny," McPard said, "you can run along now, if you want. I'm having a fingerprint man down, just in case. There's a chance the woman left some prints around. Meantime, if you happen to recall anything you forgot about, well, wise me, wise me."

Donahue said he would, and left.

He went to a restaurant in Locust Street and ordered a baked apple, two three-minute eggs, wheatcakes, toast and coffee. He killed an hour eating and reading the morning papers, and when he walked into the street again business was picking up. He went around to the post office and bought a stamped envelope which he addressed, in large block letters, to Police Headquarters. Across a money order blank he printed: *Loftman Is Ex-Representative Rathbun.*

He slipped this into the envelope and dropped the envelope into the mail slot. He left the post office and walked up Olive.

When he entered the agency office, his night man was putting on a tie and Donahue asked:

"Anything new?"

"Nothing."

"You can go home when you want, Joe."

Donahue passed on into the inner office and, still in his overcoat, carried a telephone directory to his desk, sat down and turned to the F's. He wrote down the telephone numbers of the various Flannigans, excluding the female members of the clan. Then he unhooked the receiver and asked for a number; and when the connection was made:

"Is Mr. Flannigan in? . . . Mr. Flannigan, are you acquainted with a Marcus Rathbun, one-time congressman? . . . You aren't. Thank you very much."

He hung up, waited a minute and then called the second number on his list, putting forth the same question. He repeated this procedure several times, until finally, in response to his question, a man's voice said:

"Who—who is this?"

Donahue leaned forward and said: "Mr. Flannigan, I'd like to have you drop by my office as soon as possible."

"But who is this?"

"I can't talk too much over the telephone." He gave his office address and room number, and added: "It's vitally important and I suggest you come down immediately." He hung up, rose, removed his overcoat and draped it on a wooden hanger.

When Miss Laidlaw arrived, a few minutes later, he said: "Good morning, Miss Laidlaw.

I'm expecting a man named Flannigan. When he comes, show him right in."

A messenger arrived with a telegram and Miss Laidlaw placed it on Donahue's desk. It was from the home office:

What Are You Into Now Stop Clear It Up or Else.

Halkett.

He muttered, "Nerts," and tore it into strips, tossed them into the wastepaper basket. But his forehead was wrinkled with concern and his teeth worried his lips.

At a quarter past nine Miss Laidlaw opened the inner-office door and said: "Mr. Donahue, Mr. Flannigan. Go right in, Mr. Flannigan."

She moved aside with a nod.

Flannigan was a short man with a torso shaped like a football. He had a chubby chin, chubby cheeks, and thin brass-colored hair, strategically combed, to camouflage a bald spot. His legs and arms were blunt and he looked fiftyish. He was a bit disconcerted, a little winded; his China-blue eyes tried to be friendly but appeared too worried to succeed. A neat, scrubbed-looking little Irishman dressed in dark, inconspicuous clothes.

Donahue sat on his desk, leaning on one braced arm. "You've probably been reading the papers, Mr. Flannigan. What's your idea about it?"

"About—what?"

"We're talking about Marcus Rathbun: Henry W. Loftman to the police."

Flannigan swallowed. "How did you get on the track of me?"

"I phoned the Flannigans in the directory. You were the first to show any interest in the name of Marcus Rathbun. He came to this city to see someone and I ran across your name on a memo slip."

Flannigan's chubby face looked miserable. "I haven't got a single idea what happened to him."

"Could you afford to get mixed up with the police?"

Flannigan started. "Why should I get mixed up with them?"

"The point is, could you afford to?"

Flannigan looked around for a place to sit down. He sat down and ran a harried glance back and forth across the floor.

Donahue said: "Did you know Rathbun arranged to engage the services of this agency?"

"No!" Flannigan shook his head vigorously. "Positively no!"

"Well, he did." Donahue stood up and jabbed a forefinger towards the floor. "He did. I saw him the day before that house dick was killed and he disappeared. He wanted us to fly a messenger East and bring back some

money and obviously that money was intended for someone in this city. Before he could say definitely whether or not the messenger was to leave, the crime happened."

He leaned on the desk, both arms braced straight from the shoulders. "Apparently you're the only man who knows why he came here."

Flannigan looked at him with scared, jigging eyes, with his jaw shot tremulously over to one side.

Donahue stood up straight and held his arms out from his sides. "And now I'm beginning to get in a spot. With the home office on my neck, with the police and the D. A.'s office and the press waltzing around me, I, Mr. Flannigan, am beginning to be in a spot. I've got to know why he came here, and you"—he dropped his voice to a note of finality —"can tell me."

Flannigan's chubby jaw shivered. He jumped up and cried in a stricken voice, "I had nothing to do with this! I don't see why you should—you should—" He broke off, tried to harden his jaw, make his stare bold. "I—must get—to—work!" He lunged towards the door.

Donahue said: "Okey. I'll have to turn your name over to the cops."

Flannigan's hand fell on the doorknob, but he did not turn it. His round body wilted heavily. He turned and came dragging his blunt feet back to the desk, and there was twisted anguish in his chubby face, a childlike fear in his eyes.

"You're being very cruel, Mr. Donahue."

"I don't mean to be. But I've got to know."

"If I tell you, you'll tell the police anyhow."

"Not if you're innocent of any complicity in connection with the death of Bickford."

"Bickford! I never saw the man!"

"Or the death of Rathbun."

"Rathbun! . . ."

"He was found dead a few hours ago in a cheap rooming house near the river. Apparently a suicide."

Flannigan's eyes shimmered. "What a blow, what a blow this is!" He placed a hand against the side of his head.

"Under the circumstances"—Donahue moved several articles about on his desk—"the cops might get very tough."

"My Lord, man, I—*I* had nothing to do with it!"

Donahue sat down in his swivel-chair, put his elbows on its arms and built a pyramidal fretwork of his fingers. "If that's the truth, then there doesn't seem to be any reason why you should hold out on me."

"No—no—no. It's not the crime I'm afraid of. I can prove I had nothing to do with either of those crimes. It's not that. Not

that at all. It's"—he swallowed —"something else."

"What else, Mr. Flannigan?"

Flannigan stared at him with quaking eyes. "If you tell—if it becomes known that he came here to see me—the talk about the money and all—I'll be ruined. I'm in debt as it is. Sickness. Stocks. My wife and four kids." He put his head far back, as if he found it difficult to breathe.

Donahue said in a deep, sincere voice: "If that has nothing to do with these crimes, Mr. Flannigan, you can trust me to say nothing about it to anyone."

"But it hasn't! I swear that it hasn't!"

Donahue leaned back. "What business did Rathbun come here on?"

Flannigan slumped in his chair and when he spoke his voice was dull, miserable: "Rathbun was a director of the Centaur International Engineering Company. Well, I'm with Midwest Structural, in the president's office. Years ago I worked with Rathbun and we always wrote letters afterwards, from time to time. He was a fine man, a great businessman, and he usually got what he wanted.

"Well, maybe you've heard about this new Blue River Dam that's going to be built. A tremendous job, and a lot of money in it. Sealed bids were asked for it, and the general opinion is that either Centaur or Midwest will do the job. There are a few others bidding, but they couldn't hope to compete successfully.

"I think I've been treated pretty badly by the company I work for. Maybe I haven't. But I think I have. I've taken cuts, demotions, and so on, and what with my expenses and all, I guess I took these things more bitterly than I would have otherwise. I needed money badly. I knew Centaur wanted this job and I knew it was worried about Midwest's bid, the same as Midwest was worried about their bid. I knew what our bid would be. I offered to sell out to Centaur. When a man's desperate, I guess he'll do anything.

"I wrote Rathbun about it and he said I should not write again but that he would come here and talk it over with me. So he came out, informing me beforehand that he would travel as Henry W. Loftman and that as soon as he arrived here he would send me a special delivery letter telling me where he was staying.

"I went to see him at the *Coronet* and we talked it over and I guess I began to feel a bit shaky, and guilty too. Rathbun was the same as ever. He offered me twenty thousand dollars and took out his checkbook. I said I couldn't accept a check, not because I didn't think it was good but because checks can sometimes be traced. Then he said that he would get me cash. He didn't

want to wire for it because as Loftman he had no identification and he didn't want to use his real name.

"But he said he would get it to me somehow. Then I asked him to wait a little while. I was shaky. He said that was all right and I went home and thought and thought and thought. Then the news of his disappearance—and I haven't slept a wink since. That's all—that's all. For God's sake, don't betray me, Mr. Donahue. I had nothing to do with those deaths."

"Did he express any fear of being watched?"

"None. None at all. While he was congressman he was rarely if ever photographed. He won a reputation for that."

"The police say he was seen in that rooming house with a woman."

Flannigan shook his head wearily. "I can't understand that. He was never the kind. I can't understand anything. It all seems unreal. There doesn't seem to be any connection anywhere." He looked forlornly at Donahue. "Is there anything else you want?"

Donahue stood up. "No. That's all, Mr. Flannigan. Thank you very much."

Flannigan walked to the door in a half daze, groped for the knob. "I'll never get over this, I'll never get over this," he mumbled. "And now I'll have more sleepless nights, wondering if you'll tell the police."

"It's under the hat, Mr. Flannigan—unless your story breaks up."

"God knows I've told the truth."

When Flannigan had gone, Donahue stood at his desk tapping the ends of his fingers on it. His eyes were bright, intense with thought, and one corner of his mouth was sucked in against his teeth. He let it go with a slight popping sound, sat down and looked up Bethia Samson's telephone number. Fern Chester answered.

"This is Donahue," he said. "You'd better run down and see me . . . At the office, yes . . . Say in an hour . . . Plenty!"

He pronged the receiver, rose and put on his hat and overcoat. On his way out, he said to Miss Laidlaw, "I'm going around the corner for a shave. Be back in half an hour."

Twenty minutes later he was returning up the corridor towards his office, humming to himself, when he saw vague silhouettes wafting back and forth on the soapy glass panel of the agency door. Sunlight would be streaming slantwise through the general office window and on to the glass panel of the door.

Drawing nearer, he squinted, put his hand on the knob but waited. He heard scuffling sounds beyond the door. He turned the

knob very slowly and discovered the snaplock was fast. He drew his keys from his pocket, and with the same hand took out his gun, while his other hand still held the knob turned full to the left. With the gun gripped in the crotch between thumb and forefinger, he was able to handle the keys with the remaining fingers of his right hand. He turned the lock and went in fast.

One man was struggling with Miss Laidlaw, another with Louie, the office boy. The man struggling with Louie was nearer and Donahue struck him behind the ear with a hard left fist. The man went down like a felled tree as Donahue swung his gun on the man breaking clear of Miss Laidlaw. Miss Laidlaw sat suddenly down in her chair, white with terror. Louie fell violently on the felled man.

The other was darting a hand towards his coat pocket. "No you don't, punk," Donahue said. "Up."

Miss Laidlaw's assailant raised his hands.

Miss Laidlaw panted, "Ugh, Ugh."

The young man facing Donahue smirked.

Donahue smacked him on the side of the face and said: "What's so funny?" And to the office boy, "Got it Louie?"

"Yeah, yes, Mr. Donahue. Gee whiz!" Louie stood up with the gun he had taken from the man on the floor.

Both were young, hardly twenty, and the one on the floor wore a cheap camel's hair coat and spats. The other wore dark, close-fitting clothes and a derby. His skin was swart and his hair was long, black.

"Spill it, Louie," Donahue said.

"Wuh-well, about five minutes after you went out, about five minutes, they walked in. The guy in the yellow coat held a gun on us while this other guy began going through our card indexes. Then he went through our file boxes and letter files, and when he couldn't find what he wanted, he turned on Miss Laidlaw and wanted to know where the dope was on somebody named Loftman.

"Miss Laidlaw said there wasn't any and then he began twisting her wrists. So I took a swing at him and then the other guy jumped on me and Miss Laidlaw began struggling with that one there and then you came in."

Donahue stared balefully at the two youths. He said to the one on the floor, "Get up," in a low, chopped voice.

The youth got to his feet and stood rubbing the back of his neck.

"Who sent you birds?" Donahue demanded.

"A man," said the youth in the dark clothes.

"That's a help, isn't it? Who sent you, I said?"

The two looked warily at each other.

Donahue pointed a long forefinger at them. "His name and you bums walk out of here. No name and you get a couple of cops on your neck. Well, snap on it!"

The dark-clothed youth said haltingly, "A man with—with red hair. We don't know his name. Honest, we don't. He just come up and talked to us."

"Where?"

"Bar over in Third."

"Snappy dresser? About your size?"

"I guess, yeah."

"Have you two ever been up before?"

"Uh, no. That is, just for little things. Petty, once. And once I got potted and by mistake drove a guy's car off."

Donahue nodded to the desk. "Okey. See that stamp-pad over there? Well, both you bums place the fingers of your right hand on that pad and then place them on a sheet of paper there."

"That ain't fair, mister."

"Do what I tell you!"

They shuffled reluctantly over to the desk, and when each had placed his fingerprints on a sheet of paper, Donahue nodded to the door.

"Now beat it. Take a tip and steer clear of that redhead. If he runs across you, say you couldn't get in here. And if I run across you again— Go on. Out!"

They slouched out.

Miss Laidlaw said: "You—you let them go, Mr. Donahue?"

He picked up the two sheets of paper. "I got these, didn't I? . . . Louie, run over to Police Headquarters and go down the Bureau of Criminal Identification. Ask Sergeant Bauer to check up on these and mark down the records beneath each set of prints. Be careful you don't smudge them. Miss Laidlaw, take a note. When Collins comes on duty, have him make photographs of those prints . . . Did that egg hurt you very much?"

"No, sir; I guess not."

"You hurt, Louie?"

"No, sir; I'm not hurt none."

"Swell."

FERN CHESTER remained sitting motionless in the chair for a long interval after Donahue told her of Marcus Rathbun's death. Her face was very white, and this made her eyes seem darker, deeper, and brought out the color of her lips, a warm rose-pink.

Donahue lounged with a lanky leg thrown over an arm of his chair, his chin mashing the knot of his tie, his face long, brown, hollowed out beneath the high, strong cheekbones.

She murmured in a remote voice, "What will be the end of it?"

"It's a sticker," he muttered. "Now his wife will have to be notified."

"I faked a message to the police—anonymous. They should know by now his name isn't Loftman. No use concealing that any longer. The thing is"—he gave her an up-from-under look—"they say he went there with a woman."

She looked at him.

"I know it was the night you were at the *Casa Caliente,*" he said. "You might have to prove you were there. You like this Judge Emmett's son?"

"Well—sort of. Nothing serious. Ralph's professed—oh, well, he's an ardent boy, very intense. But"—her eyes widened—"surely we won't have to drag Ralph in. The family's so — strait-laced." Her face clouded. "Or maybe you've told about me?"

"No, no; nothing like that. But there's no telling where this thing may lead to, who'll get dragged into it. Kelly McPard and his partner Lankford are a couple of swell cops, but they're cops, and you can't blame them for that. Then there's this Red Phalen, the legman—a glutton for news, especially where decent names are involved. And Stratford, of the District Attorney's office."

"Such a miserable mess," she cried, grimacing. "But this woman angle—I can't believe it. He was so straight about things like that and there seems to be no reason for the woman. It's all beginning to look a little mad. Where's the reason for everything? . . .

"Oh, I can see the lurid headlines already." She stared straight ahead, her breast beginning to rise and fall rapidly. "And I know, I'm sure they'll be untrue, utter falsehoods."

She leaned forward and placed her hand on the desk and said in a sunken voice: "Should I go to the police after all? Should I tell them everything? Everything I've told you? About the memo I saw, about how I knew all along his name wasn't Loftman? I'll do it, I'll do it. And I'll tell them that all this lurid stuff about Mr. Rathbun can't be true, can't possibly be true."

He sat up straight, his fingers raised. "No." He leaned on his elbows, his eyes dark, fastened on the effigy of Jack Dempsey. "You'll get in for a lot of unpleasant notoriety, you may even be charged with withholding vital evidence from the police. The kick-back will hit me—the agency. And that's not all." He made a fist, remembering Flannigan: he'd struck a bargain with Flannigan.

She opened her handbag. It was oblong, of black patent leather, and had a leather flap with the large initials FC attached in chromium plate. Taking out a small handkerchief, she

said: "You would never have become involved so deeply if it hadn't been for me."

He made a brusque gesture. "Probably would have. I seem to have a talent for it."

Miss Laidlaw brought in a telegram. It said:

Well What About It Wiseguy.

The home office again.

Donahue balled it up and whipped it violently across the room. Miss Laidlaw raised her prim eyebrows.

"Wait," Donahue muttered. He wrote on a piece of foolscap in a bold, broad scrawl. "Wire this back," he said.

His reply advised:

Do Not Believe All You Read Stop Give Me Time

It took him a minute or two to calm down, and during that interval Fern Chester sat with her eyes dutifully turned the other way.

He shoved things around on his desk and said: "Excuse the blowoff." And then he went on in a deep, quick voice: "The thing now is, we're involved and we can't expect the cops to treat us with any great amount of consideration. It's a case of our knowing too much and yet not enough. If we knew less, we'd be much better off. But the 'if's' don't count. Loftman's true identity will clear up one angle but on the other hand it will magnify the whole thing over and over again.

"I might be able to keep the cops off our neck for a while by coming out with the statement that I think Marcus Rathbun was murdered. There've been some balmy ideas floating around in my head for the past several hours and I think I could put up a good front. I've no concrete ideas, only theoretical ones, which as a rule I don't like, but in this instance I've got to break a rule. I want to start the investigation up another alley, mainly to draw their attention away from this theoretical blonde."

"But wouldn't you have to name someone you thought might be guilty of the murder?"

"I've got that in mind too."

She made a wry face. "All because of me. All my fault. It's so unfair to you!" She hung her head and twisted her handkerchief round and round.

He stood up and leaned on his braced arms. "Say, do you ever eat dinner out?"

She nodded. "Sometimes."

"I know a place where they make a filet of sole that'd melt in your mouth."

"I love filet of sole."

He laughed with rough good humor. "Well, I can see this thing hasn't got you down completely. And frankly," he continued, slightly out of the side of his mouth, "I think the Judge's son looks a little on the rah-rah side."

"Do you always mix business with pleasure?"

"I did once in my life and look where I am."

"You'll likely regret it," she said ruefully.

He tossed a coin into the air, slapped it, palmed it. "I was only kidding."

She sighed, "You're a funny man. I can never quite make you out." But she didn't seem displeased about it.

VII

DONAHUE STRODE into Police Headquarters with his long legs swinging purposefully. He went past the elevator, took the stairway up to the second floor, walked to the front of the corridor and entered Kelly McPard's office.

"Hey, Donny, what'd you think?" Lankford boomed.

"The new kid can say 'Pop.' Right?"

"Loftman's a ex-congressman named Marcus Rathbun!"

"What's this, a joke?"

McPard was sitting comfortably in his chair and drawing thoughtfully on a long panetela. "No joke, Donny. We received an anonymous message a little while ago. I chased over to one of the newspaper offices and found out when he was a congressman. Then I rooted around some more there and finally found a picture of him. They said it was only one of three the news photographers had ever got. And it was him, all right—it was Loftman."

"Boy, ain't that a break!" exclaimed Lankford, slapping his thigh. "Boy, that's a break!"

"You mean to tell us, Donny," McPard said, "you never knew who Loftman really was when you interviewed him?"

"Cross my heart, Kel."

McPard frowned. "The D. A., I think, is going to have you over on the carpet. You got Stratford sore. He's not satisfied with your position in this case and I think they're going to put you over the hurdles."

"Swell."

"I wouldn't be too cocky, Don," Lankford advised sagely.

Donahue laughed. "Maybe I killed Bickford, huh? Maybe I killed Rathbun too?"

"No," said McPard. "But maybe you've got an idea who the woman in the case is. Red swears you meant it when you said you were going up to see a blonde, and now that we find a woman was with Rathbun when he took that room down near the river, why, it looks as if Red might be right. It occurred to me that maybe when the date was made for you and Rathbun, a woman made it."

"Rathbun himself made it, Kel."

McPard smoked in troubled silence for a while, then asked absently, "You come here for something, Donny?"

Donahue sat down, bending his brows darkly. "There's an idea been getting the best of me."

"I'm glad to see someone's getting ideas around here."

"I don't think Rathbun committed suicide."

"Oh, phooey," Lankford said, sourfaced.

"Why, Donny?" McPard asked.

Donahue looked from one to the other intently before continuing. Then he said, "Well, I've never heard of a suicide yet who deliberately destroyed all evidene of his identity. Usually they leave notes. Even though Rathbun was traveling under an assumed name, ten to one he carried a wallet; ten to one that wallet contained money and plenty of identification. And the fact that you've just told me who he really was makes me more certain that the identification was destroyed by someone else."

"Why?" McPard asked.

"Because when an unidentified man is found dead, the wheels move slowly and sometimes it takes a long while to identify him. That gives the killer more time to put distance between himself and the scene of the crime. If the deceased's name was found out right away, you might be able to check up immediately on his acquaintances."

McPard looked at his cigar. "I was kind of fooling around with a similar idea, but in this police work, you know as well as I do, the unexpected always happens."

"Tell me this, Kel. Tell me why Bickford crashed the apartment of an ex-congressman and give me some good, logical reason why an ex-congressman should haul off and brain a house detective."

"I've been thinking of that too, all along. But facts are facts. Bickford was killed and then we find Rathbun a suicide."

Donahue shook his head. "Let's say that he wasn't a suicide. I'm going to stick to my contention that a suicide wouldn't destroy every ounce of identification."

Lankford asked: "He left his hotel key, didn't he?"

"That only identified him as Loftman."

"But then who knocked off Bickford?" Lankford demanded.

Donahue laid a hard fist on the desk. "Let's go back a bit. Let's go back to those two guys who occupied five hundred forty-five before Rathbun did: O'Fallon and Fauls."

"Whoops! Listen to the man!" Lankford guffawed.

"Kid me," Donahue said, "but keep your ears open. They were tossed out on the fourth. Rathbun checked in on the morning of the fifth, as Loftman. You know as well as I do that McCartney remained in the apartment while he made O'Fallon

and Fauls pack, in fifteen minutes, and then ran them over to the railroad station. Has it ever occurred to you that O'Fallon and Fauls may have buried a lot of dough in that apartment?"

McPard laid his cigar aside, folded his arms. "Go ahead, Donny."

"All right. Now say a woman came up to Rathbun's apartment and knocked. Say she pretended she was some kind of welfare worker—I've had it happen to me in the best hotels. Or even say that she came into the hotel with a hat and coat on, but over a uniform such as hotel housekeepers wear. Say a man was with her and they went up to the fifth floor by the stairway. She took off her street things when they got there. The man held them and then she knocked and when Rathbun opened the door she said she was the housekeeper and wanted to check up on the linen.

"As he let her in, the man also went in with her. Then the woman held a gun on Rathbun while the man got the money, wherever it was hidden. As they were leaving, Bickford came down the hall, saw them, and they backed into the apartment again but Bickford crashed in too. He chased them to the bedroom, where they struggled, while the woman continued to keep Rathbun covered.

"In the struggle, the man smacked Bickford on the temple with the butt of his gun and Bickford went down. Then they waited a while, to make sure no attention was drawn in the corridor. Before leaving, they took a look at Bickford and found he was dead. Murder. Rathbun would remember them. So they took Rathbun along with them."

Lankford was jovial: "Boy, what stories you make up!"

McPard was attentive: "But McCartney swears he saw O'Fallon and Fauls off on a California-bound train."

"Which means, I suppose, that they'd have to go all the way to California."

"But it sounds farfetched, Donny. It's not the kind of angle a man can set his teeth in."

"If I could think of any other angle, I'd discard this. But the thing sticks in my nut. And the suicide angle sticks in my throat. Especially since you've told me who Loftman really was. Listen, let me see that newspaper clipping again—the one you found on Rathbun."

McPard opened his desk drawer, passed the clipping to Donahue. Once more Donahue scanned the account of how one John Leffler had died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

"There's no date line with the item," McPard offered.

"That usually means it happened in the city where the paper was published. There's no Blue

Ridge Road in this city. Now look at the back of this clip: there's part of an ad for furniture, and the name of the store is Kinderman Brothers. It advertises a clubchair and ottoman: 'For Sale—Saturday only.' All right, call a wholesale furniture dealer in this city and ask if they know of a store named Kinderman Brothers, and if they do, where it's located. Go ahead."

McPard looked in the classified telephone directory and put through a call. When he hung up, he said: "Kansas City, Missouri."

"Now call Kinderman Brothers in Kansas City, describe this ad and ask 'em on what date it was published in the newspaper."

Lankford's face was dark brown with interest now.

McPard put through the Long Distance call and in a few minutes was in communication with Kinderman Brothers. He made notes as he listened, and said, presently: "Thank you a great deal, sir," and hung up.

"On the fifth of the month," he told Donahue. "In all Kansas City papers."

Donahue got up from the chair and leaned on the desk. "All right, now. It was on the evening of the fourth O'Fallon and Fauls were put on that westbound train. Rathbun arrived in this city on the fifth, from the East. From the East, mind you, not from the West. I will bet this: I will bet that O'Fallon and Fauls got off that westbound train late the night of the fourth, spent the night at a hotel there and came back to this city next day, possibly with the woman.

"I'll bet that clip came with them from Kansas City and I'd like to bet it was planted on Rathbun. It was a good idea for the suicide angle."

The telephone rang and McPard answered it. "For you, Gus," he said.

Lankford took it. "Yeah? . . . Yeah, Sophie . . . Hah? . . . No! . . . Yes? . . . No, Sophie! You don't tell me! . . . Be home for dinner, hon!" He smacked the receiver into the hook and beamed on McPard and Donahue. "My new kid just walked the whole length of the bedroom! Imagine!"

Kelly McPard chuckled.

Donahue grinned. "Chip off the old block, huh, Gus?"

"A man's man, that kid, Donny!" Lankford puffed.

McPard rose and said: "Suppose, Donny, you and I take another look at five hundred forty-five."

"I was just about to suggest that myself."

"You, Gus," McPard said, "hold down the desk till I get back."

Donahue and McPard rode out to the *Coronet* in a police sedan. They got one of the assist-

ant managers, a man named Floom, to take them up to 545. The apartment was unoccupied. Rathbun's baggage, of course, had been taken to Headquarters. McPard stood in the center of the living-room, his hands on his hips, his eyes swinging nimbly and curiously about the room.

"Well, Donny, what would be your idea?"

Donahue said: "If they had a lot of money hidden here, and if it had been easily accessible, they could have got it into their bags while Mac and Bickford were waiting. We ought to assume that the money was not easily accessible, that they didn't have time to get it. It's highly probable, Kel, that they ran some stiff games here and won a lot of dough. If they did, there was always the chance of being knocked over by some of their guests, especially the sore losers. So they would have bunked it deep."

"The bed?"

"Never. That's a cinch. Same with the carpet, or behind the pictures, or in the divans or the chairs. Just think of all the average places the average mugg would hide it and then forget those places. Then think of some place where it would be difficult to bunk it and just as difficult to get it out."

"The wall," suggested Floom.

"That's good, Mr. Floom—only the wall's made of plaster. Let's look at the doorway frames."

They spread out and it was Floom who called, "Look at this a minute," from the pantry doorway.

In the crevice between the outer strip and the base of the doorway frame the paint was slightly chipped.

"Get the house carpenter," Donahue said.

A Swede appeared in five minutes with a kit of tools, and to him Donahue said: "See this? Have you done any fixing on this very recently?"

"Me? No, sir."

"How long have you worked here?"

"Three years, sir."

"This chipping looks fresh, doesn't it?"

"It does, kind of."

"When was this apartment last decorated?"

Floom put in, "About eight months ago, completely."

Donahue turned to the carpenter. "Pry that panel out, will you?"

The carpenter took a chisel from his kit and pried the panel out. The space it disclosed was empty. Kelly McPard sighed.

"Did that seem to come off easily?" Donahue asked.

"Yes, sir, it did."

Donahue looked at McPard. "A great deal of money *could* have been planted in behind that panel, Kel."

"But in getting the panel back," Floom said, "they would have had to hammer it. I don't see any marks on the paint."

Donahue went into the bedroom and came back with a pillow. "Let's borrow that hammer," he said to the carpenter. He then placed one corner of the pillow against the panel and hammered the pillow until the panel was again secure. The hammering had left no mark.

"Think it over, Kel," he said.

"It listens," McPard nodded, his voice very soft.

Donahue turned to Floom. "Who has the apartment beneath this?"

"It's vacant at present."

"How long?"

"Well, it may seem to be a curious circumstance, but it was vacated at about noon of the day Mr. Bickford was killed. But wait a minute." He smiled, shook his head. "No connection with this. The occupant just moved to another suite, on the other side of the hotel. She said the main street was becoming too public, too noisy. So we moved her. She's quite old."

Donahue eyed McPard quizzically. "Should we, Kel?"

"No harm, I guess."

Floom took them to the eighth floor, on the north side of the building, and knocked on the door of 816. It was opened by a small, frail old woman with a high, knotty haircomb.

Floom bowed and said: "Excuse me, Mrs. Telfair, but the police would like to ask you a few questions."

Her head went back. "Ask *me* a few questions?"

Kelly McPard's smooth, smiling voice crept in: "Just a few, madam. It's in connection with what happened in the apartment above the one you used to occupy. Did you ever hear any hammering there, or a sound like wood being pried apart?"

"I don't think I did," she replied indignantly.

"We just thought that perhaps you had your apartment changed because of the noise upstairs."

"Well; there was noise sometimes, but it wasn't because of that I moved. No, it certainly wasn't because of that."

McPard was gentle of voice and gesture. "Something else, madam?"

Her mouth screwed up, her eyes flashed. "Well, if you must know, yes. My only pleasure in life nowadays is reading. I used to sit by that large window in four hundred forty-five practically all day long, reading. I'm a very nervous person and I suppose very irritable at times. Well, sir, I became tired of being gaped at."

"Gaped at?"

"Yes, gaped at. In that cheap hotel across the street. A busybody kept continually using

binoculars and I *know* he trained them on my favorite window."

"For how long?"

"It must have been for a couple of days. I finally became exasperated and had my apartment changed."

"Was it a man, madam?"

"I think it was."

McPard and Donahue looked at each other and then Donahue said: "Do you mind coming down to four hundred forty-five, madam, and pointing out just what window the binoculars were used from?"

"It seems silly, but I don't mind, I suppose."

They all went down to 445, and standing at the window, the old woman pointed. "That one."

"How many windows up and how many from the left?" Donahue asked.

She counted, then said: "Six up and the fourth from the left."

"It's practically on a level," McPard observed, "with the fifth floor of this hotel."

Donahue nodded. "It's very much so."

As they walked across the street to the *Hotel Malvern,* McPard said: "If it's so, maybe they left around some fingerprints. And if they're O'Fallon's and Fauls' prints, it's a hundred to one they had something to do with it. And then I can shoot an alarm for them, nation-wide, if I have to. They could be anywhere by this time."

McPard had with him the card on which O'Fallon and Fauls had registered at the *Coronet* as Herbert Gearman and P. T. Lancaster, of Dodge City, Iowa. McPard addressed the clerk at the *Malvern's* desk:

"I'm from Police Headquarters. Looking at your hotel from the front, what room number on the sixth floor would be the fourth window from the left? Think carefully."

The clerk turned to a framed plan of the hotel. "That's a double, number six hundred twenty-seven."

"Who is in it?"

The clerk referred to the register. "Two gentlemen—Philip Cranston and R. B. Escott, of Milwaukee."

"When did they register?"

"On the afternoon of the fifth."

McPard leaned forward and said very quietly: "They're still here, are they?"

"Of course."

The lieutenant looked at Donahue. "Now it doesn't get warm anymore, Donny."

"Look at the handwriting."

McPard looked. Donahue looked also. They checked it with the handwriting on the *Coronet's* card, and McPard shook his head. "I'm no expert, but I'll swear it was never made by the same man."

"Maybe O'Fallon registers sometimes, Fauls others."

"Now that makes it a little warmer again." And to the clerk: "Have you any idea what these men look like?"

"No, sir. I see by this record that I checked them in, but I don't remember what they look like. I work the cashier's desk too and I've noticed that all their meals have been served in the room, and they used a lot of ice and mineral water."

"Tell room service that when this room rings again, they should say, yes, the stuff will be brought right up. But don't send it up. Tell me. We'll sit over there and wait. Come on, Donny."

An hour and fifteen minutes later the clerk came over to say, "There was a call for cracked ice and a syphon."

McPard stood up. "Okay, mister; thanks to you."

Donahue and McPard rode in the elevator to the sixth floor, got off and walked slowly down a narrow corridor.

"Better take out your guns," McPard murmured, "just in case."

Donahue withdrew a revolver from beneath his left arm and Kelly McPard knocked on the door. They stood side by side, their guns held low, down against their thighs. The door was opened by a tall, yellow-haired man and McPard jammed his gun hard against this man's stomach and said:

"Raise them, Fauls."

The yellow-haired man almost fell over backwards, with a sharp inarticulate cry high in the roof of his mouth. A man lying on the bed, with a bandaged foot, whipped a gun from the pocket of a blue silk robe and fired. The bullet whanged into the transom above the door.

Donahue, standing sidewise in the doorway, fired and hit the man in the chest and plastered him back against the pillow. The man set his mouth and tried to swing his gun down but Donahue strode towards him, his own gun leveled, his low voice saying:

"Don't do it, O'Fallon."

"Did you get him, Donny?" McPard asked.

"Plenty."

O'Fallon let his arm and the gun drop to the bed. He groaned, closed his eyes, gritted his teeth.

"I'm sorry, O'Fallon," Donahue said, "but you should have known better."

Fauls was breathing noisily, red color high on his cheeks.

Kelly McPard smiled up into his blond face. "It's just one of those things, Jess," he said in his friendly way.

VIII

MISS LAIDLOW HELD up a slip of paper as Donahue came into

the office. She said: "Miss Chester phoned about twenty minutes ago and left this number and said she would wait half an hour."

And Louie said: "Them fingerprints and all are on your desk, Mr. Donahue."

"Thanks, Louie. Miss Laidlaw, ring this number. I'll take it in my office."

He was sitting at his desk studying the records of two petty criminals named Michael O'Hara and Dominick Cairoli, alias the Kick-In Kid, when Miss Laidlaw said: "Miss Chester is on the wire."

He unhooked the receiver. "Your favorite detective," he said.

"Listen," her low, anxious voice came over the wire. "I'm calling from the dressing-room in the Fisk Theater. I don't know what to do. When I stepped into the street from your office building, a man was standing on the curb. I thought he looked curiously at me. Then I noticed he was following me."

"What's he look like?"

"Well, red hair—"

"Then what did you do?"

"I went into a department store and fooled around in there for about half an hour, but when I came out, after I'd walked a while, I saw he was still following me. I didn't want to go home, because that would have meant perhaps getting Aunt Bethia involved, and she's a bundle of nerves as it is. So I stopped in a restaurant and frittered away about an hour.

"But when I went out, well, he was still around. Then I went into the Fisk and spent about two hours and a half watching two very stupid pictures, but when I came out into the lobby, I saw him standing outside. So I went into the dressing-room and phoned you and I've been here ever since. What *should* I do?"

"Come right over here."

"But—"

"Right over here. Let him follow you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Her "All right, then," was breathless and confused.

She came in about fifteen minutes later and almost instantly she cried, "He did! He followed me to the outside of the building and I think I saw him come in as I started up in the elevator."

"You look rattled. Sit down and try to be calm."

"Calm! After I've been followed—"

He smiled, made soothing gestures. "Down . . . and easy; take things a little easy."

She sat on the very edge of the chair. "But why do you suppose he followed me?"

Donahue pointed to her handbag. "Your initials on that bag

are big enough to attract attention."

"But it's supposed to be rather smart."

"I don't doubt it. But Red saw them as you left this building. He remembered the initials on the handkerchief you dropped in the corridor of the *Coronet.*"

"Oh, dear. Oh, dear, what'll I do? What *will* I do?"

"For one thing," he said, leaning forward on his elbows, "you can listen to me. I want to tell you that we got the fellows who killed Marcus Rathbun *and* Bickford."

"You—*what?*"

"In the *Malvern Hotel.* While they lived at the *Coronet* they ran some pretty high card games and made a lot of money, but they were wise donkeys and buried most of it behind a doorway panel. They were kicked precipitately out of the apartment by Bickford and a metropolitan detective and bounced on to a westbound train. They hadn't the time to pry open the panel and get their money. It was about thirty thousand dollars.

"They got off at Kansas City and came back here and took a room in the *Malvern,* across the street from the *Coronet.* From their window they could watch the apartment from which they'd been thrown out. With binoculars, of course. They used powerful ones. They wanted to become familiar with what the occupant looked like. Then they saw me in there and Fauls recognized me from newspaper photos.

"He stuck me up in the lavatory at the hockey games and tried to find out why I was in the apartment. Rathbun kept close to the hotel, but finally they saw him get dressed for the street. Fauls with his hat way down, his collar way up, hurried over and parked just inside the *Coronet* door. Rathbun left, taking his key along.

"Fauls followed Rathbun, who walked rapidly—obviously he was out for the air; for he took to the park. O'Fallon by this time was up ahead of Rathbun. They worked it nicely. On one of the quiet lanes, O'Fallon stopped and bent down to adjust a shoelace. Rathbun came up. O'Fallon stopped him and then Fauls came up. Fauls took Rathbun's hotel key and O'Fallon said to Rathbun, 'Now you and I will just continue to walk in the park until my friend rejoins us.'

"Fauls went back to the *Coronet,* ducked in a side entrance and took the stairway up. He had a chisel and a hammer with him. He pried out the panel in five hundred forty-five, jammed the money into all his pockets and into the lining of his overcoat. He was stepping back into

the corridor when Bickford happened along and jumped at him. Fauls ran into the bedroom, with Bickford after him.

"He turned on Bickford and cracked him with the butt of his gun. Bickford went down. Fauls waited a while, listening. Then, before leaving, he took a look at Bickford. Bickford was dead. Murder.

"Fauls slipped out, walked up the street and stole a car. He drove out to the park and picked up O'Fallon and Rathbun. O'Fallon was as surprised as anyone at the sight of Fauls in a car. Fauls drew him aside and explained what had happened. They were in a jam. They'd intended all along returning the key to Rathbun and letting him go. But now there was murder. Rathbun could describe them to the police.

"It was O'Fallon who got the bright idea, after several hours of riding around, of doing away with Rathbun and making it look like suicide. He was the one who'd clipped an item from a Kansas City newspaper about carbon monoxide poisoning. He had a complete woman's outfit at the *Malvern,* and while Fauls waited in the car with Rathbun, several blocks away, O'Fallon went back to the *Malvern* and dolled up.

"He rejoined the others and they began driving around, finally working down near the river. Then O'Fallon told Rathbun that they were going to rent a room. Rathbun would do the talking—or else. O'Fallon showed him the gun. So they left Fauls.

"What O'Fallon wanted was a room with a coal stove in it. They looked in three places and finally found one in the fourth. Then O'Fallon told Rathbun that he would not be harmed. He was to be detained for a couple of days and would then be released. He must have been pretty reassuring, which he meant to be. Because after a while Rathbun who probably was fagged out from the nervous excitement, fell asleep on the bed.

"Fauls swiped his wallet and burned it in the stove. Then he put some coal on the fire, pulled the stove pipe from the chimney and stuffed up the hole with newspapers. He left the room, after unlatching the rear window, and for three hours waited in a stairwell on the floor below. Then he went out, around back, climbed the fire-escape and opened the rear window. He waited there for ten minutes. Rathbun did not move. Finally O'Fallon climbed in and saw he was dead.

"He replaced the key in the inside of the door, went back out the window, closed it and climbed down the fire-escape. He had on high-heeled shoes,

and he was almost to the bottom when he fell, turned his ankle. He walked several blocks, limping, and got into a taxi and returned to the *Malvern*. By the time he reached the room he could hardly walk. Fauls had discarded the stolen car half a mile from the hotel. Well, the ankle got worse and worse. O'Fallon could not stand on it. They couldn't get away.

"But they didn't worry much, because they figured they had done a smooth job. They had. They'd never have been caught if I hadn't started to make up a fairy tale that turned, before long, into a true story that even I began to believe. It just goes to show what the forces of necessity will sometimes lead to."

Miss Laidlaw stood in the connecting doorway. "He's in again," she said hopelessly.

Fern Chester, her eyes transfixed on Donahue, said: "It's awful, it's terrible," in a low, cluttered voice.

And then she looked up and saw Red Phalen standing in the doorway, a small, sly smile on his lips. "In again, out again, in again," he said laughing softly.

Fern Chester sat breathless, staring straight ahead.

"Sing your song, Red," Donahue said, leaning back comfortably. "Though I know the words and music by heart."

Phalen sauntered up to the desk, smiling insinuatively down at the girl. "If the young lady wears 'FC' on her handbag, she likely wears it on her handkerchiefs. Catch on, Donny?"

Donahue put his hands behind his head. "Red, would you like to lose your job?"

"I'd love to, Handsome."

"Would like to get tossed in the jug?"

"Just cur-razy to!"

"The thing is, Red, I'm not kidding. Take a look at those two sheets of paper."

"These?"

"Those."

Phalen picked up the two sheets of paper and lounged back on his heels with an exaggerated air of nonchalance. He considered the fingerprints and the petty criminal records of two youths named Michael O'Hara and Dominick Cairoli. Presently he did not appear so nonchalant. His eyes lifted towards Donahue as he let the two sheets of paper slide from his fingers. His lips twitched a little while the rest of his face grew dull.

Donahue said cheerfully: "I can pick those punks up in a minute, Red. It's up to you."

Phalen's mouth went over to one side. "Fast, aren't you?" he said.

Donahue laughed. "Or maybe you're slow. Why, you cheap little sensation-hunting fathead, you've been scooped by every

legman in town. While you were shadowing a will-o'-the-wisp practically all afternoon, history's been made. Roll your hoop over to Headquarters and they'll tell you who killed Bickford and Rathbun—and why."

Despite himself, Phalen began to look a little ill.

Donahue roared with laughter.

Phalen turned on his heel, his face and neck crimson. He rushed out of the office, a blind, dizzy look in his eyes.

Fern Chester had not yet relaxed. "What does it mean?" she asked in a tense whisper.

"It means a little deal that's not on the records. He sent two bums around to crash my files and I nailed them. Instead of arresting them, I turned them loose. It just means that he'll never ring in that handkerchief gag again, because if he does, I'll ring in the two bums and Red will lose his job and land in jail. It's just the way we play house sometimes."

She relaxed at last, and a tired but warm smile came to her face. "How good, how so very good you've been to me. I don't see why."

"Maybe I liked your face right off the bat."

"It's quite an ordinary face."

"Maybe it's the way you wear your clothes."

"They are quite ordinary clothes."

"I was talking about the way you wear them."

She looked up at him. "Honestly, did you believe in me implicitly from the first?"

"I don't think I did."

"When did you begin to?"

"I can't remember exactly."

She said with sudden warmth, "That's what I like about you—you're so downright honest."

"Listen," he said, clasping his hands together. "Let's cut out all this and make a date. I've got a cheap car and I never drive while drunk but sometimes I go around ringing strange doorbells."

She broke into a gay little laugh. "I think we'd have fun. And if you got tight—well, I could drive."

"That's a pal for you. That's a real pal!"

Miss Laidlaw came in with a telegram. Donahue read:

Detäils Instanter or You Are Canned Dummy.

Halkett.

Donahue chuckled to himself and wrote out a reply. "Send this right off, Miss Laidlaw," he said.

Miss Laidlaw, in her front office, read the reply. Her small prim mouth grew round with astonishment.

Horse on You Funny Face Stop Read Press Tomorrow.

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SD 64

by a thread

by . . . Eric Frank Russell

There's an appalling amount of injustice in the world—much of it due to dubious and unsound methods of criminal detection.

IN THESE dynamic days when new laws are being turned out like cans of baby food on a mechanical conveyor, and when every one of us can become an unwitting criminal overnight it should be enlightening to contemplate the methods by which the last remnants of our individual freedom may be stolen from us and the dreadful thinness of the thread on which life itself may hang.

Time and time again people have gone to the chair or been adorned with a loop of rope for alleged crimes other than murder, and even in common law you don't have to commit murder to swing or burn. You have only to be found guilty by a jury of your peers. Considering human fallibility, those two circumstances may have little in common. And when talking of common law we mean what you think we mean, namely, civil law. But people can be and have been expedited into the hereafter un-

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A mystery magazine which rigidly excludes from its pages all non-fictional material runs the risk of becoming a trifle hidebound. With an eye to preventing that danger we've presenting herewith a non-fictional—but emphatically not non-fascinable!—excursion into the exciting realm of dactyloscopy by the brilliant English writer Eric Frank Russell. Dactyloscopy—as Mr. Russell scarcely needed to point out to our readers—is nothing more than a fancy name for fingerprinting. Draw a deep breath then, and brace yourself for a truly astounding evaluation of a hitherto infallible crime-detecting shibboleth.

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der martial law or some imaginary paragraph of non-existent international law, and not always for murder.

Pro-Nazi Britisher William Joyce, who broadcasted for Hitler, was not executed as a murderer but solely as one who brazenly and stubbornly voiced personal opinions disliked by politicos on the winning side. Many folk may consider his death well-deserved but purely emotional conclusions cannot dispose of the grim fact that Joyce was strung up because of his views, a feature of justice so blatantly doubtful that it still causes qualms among British jurists whose patriotism is above reproach. And such jurists are by no means few in number.

With Joyce and several others of his stripe we have created a terrible precedent that someday, in other and more ominous circumstances, may be used to justify executing more worthy people for airing other opinions.

But for the unexpected and ferocious courage of Emile Zola a gang of political racketeers would have made a corpse of Dreyfus to cover their own misdeeds. And but for powerful influences in the world today that crackpot gang hanged at Nuremberg would have been accompanied on the gallows by their financial lords and masters, the shadowy figures behind their respective thrones who now run free to plot and plan another and greater holocaust.

In this modern Alice-in-Wonderland set-up we are forced to run like the devil to stay in one place, and people can be whisked away for daring to speak out of turn.

Weapon Number One in the armory of those who at any time may see fit to menace your liberty or life is The Law. It is a tough and most effective instrument of infinite adaptability because—providing that millions of sleepy people let them get away with it—The Law is whatever the lawmakers say it is. At any given moment, in any given circumstances, the lawmakers can be trusted to define it in the manner most convenient to themselves.

Thus, if the powers-that-be suddenly find it expedient to admit the so-called "evidence" of lie-detectors then forthwith lie-detector evidence becomes admissible. A thousand, aye, ten thousand lie-detectors appear from sources that care not a hoot for justice or the freedom of the individual but care greatly for the profits to be derived from the manufacture of lie-detectors.

Then, sooner or later, the meaningless waggle of a meaningless needle is employed as the last straw to break some unhappy camel's back—probably sooner if it be considered desirable to break said spine with the minimum of delay.

The technique has been tried already. It will be tried again, and again. In justice to what little is left of human spirit we must admit that there have been cases where those alert to defend individual liberty have forced the pseudo-scientists who operate this gadget to tote their junk elsewhere. In further justice we say there are more sharp-witted citizens waiting to damn the damnable at every future appearance. How greatly are slumbering millions indebted to wide-awake dozens!

Nevertheless, a lie-detector was used to "get evidence" in the case of the stolen jewels of Hesse, though press reports were strangely vague about the nature and value of the data thus obtained. The stuff couldn't have been worth much even after its lunacy had been mistranslated in legal terms, yet may well have been construed as sufficient because such a construction was expedient. It is the last grain on the pile of circumstantial evidence that often tilts the scales of justice one way or the other, and if said grain be imaginary, an outrageous fake, a piece of mechanistic blah . . . ?

One man has been swung by it. He sat at the idiotic contraption, eyes rolling with superstitious fear. His lungs breathed because they had to, his heart beat because he couldn't stop it, his pores exuded sweat because they were designed for that purpose, his pulse pulsed, his blood-pressure pressured and he produced all the understandable symptoms of one in imminent danger of his life. The thing waved its needle around and the inquisitors studied the needle's motions with clownish profundity,

"Guilty as hell!" they said and poor, purblind, thwarted Justice took her intolerable course. As easy as that. Theme song: *It Had To Be You.*

All that the lie-detector does —and inefficiently at that—is measure the victim's physical reactions to pertinent questions, leaving it to the operator to decide as arbitrarily as he likes whether the resultant readings point to innocence or guilt. In the opinion of lie-detector advocates it is a mark of progress that men be tried by machines. Their notion of Utopia is a world of fleshly robots drilled and disciplined by metal ones.

The truth-serum functions as second string to the bow of those who maintain mastery of the man in the street. It is as futile yet as employable as the lie-detector, its meanings just as meaningless. In theory, anyone subjected to a dollop of truth-serum goes into a mental haze during which he produces answers from his subconscious mind wherein, it is said, lurks truth, the whole truth and noth-

ing but the truth, naked and unadorned.

This pristine purity of the subconscious is a theory invented by serum-squirters to suit the convenience of their juice. When conveniences change, theories change with them and the subconscious is then said to be a cesspool of fantasy. This latter notion provides a handy pretext for planting the victim in a mental home whenever it is deemed inexpedient to have him hanged or electrocuted. That's the beauty of having The Law in your pocket: you can catch them either way, coming or going.

But the threat to personal liberty offered by lie-detectors and truth-serums is as nothing to that made by another, older, more widely accepted piece of legalistic mumbo-jumbo which, for all we know, may have slaughtered a dozen innocents along with ten dozen of the guilty. We are referring to the pseudo-science of dactyloscopy, as nice a sample of witch-doctor palaver as ever fooled a trembling Zulu.

Dactyloscopy, believe it or not, is nothing more than the fancy name for fingerprinting. A dactyloscopist is the policeman who stands in the witness box and swears by Almighty God that it was your fingerprints they found on the bomb which exploded under an income-tax assessor.

The court receives this pious belief as if it were a scientific fact scientifically demonstrated. Stuck on top of a rare assortment of positive, negative and in-between facts, allegations, imaginations, implications and the fancies of half-witted witnesses, it can prove the last straw. The scales of Justice tilt accordingly —and somebody pays an appalling price.

Circumstantial evidence can be the darnedest thing. Astute lawyers know it, try push over whole haystacks of it. The police know it likewise, hence occasional attempts to fasten up a case good and proper by larruping a confession out of a suspect. The sheer perversity of chance can and sometimes does pile up circumstantial evidence against an innocent person until all that is needed is the "confirmatory evidence" of dactyloscopy to make him doubt his own innocence and wonder whether he really did perform the deed while under hypnosis or afflicted by somnambulism.

"First rule of Dactyloscopy: There are no two identical fingerprints."—*Modern Criminal Investigation* by Dr. Harry Soderman and John J. O'Connell. Dr. Harry Soderman is or was head of the Institute of Police Science at Stockholm. John J. O'Connell is or was Deputy Chief Inspector, New York Police Department.

In *Modern Criminal Investigation* they go on to say, "Galton,

in his book *Fingerprints*, showed mathematically that there could not be two identical fingerprints, but opponents raised the objection that these calculations were purely theoretical and that a sufficient number of prints had not yet been examined."

From there they proceed to assert that enough prints have now been taken and they are "satisfied" that no two identical prints exist. What number is deemed sufficient and who deems it is not stated.

Francis Galton, who "showed mathematically" that there can be no two identical fingerprints (note that he says two prints and not two complete sets of prints), does not impress us in the least. We have had long and lunatic experience of mathematical experts who seem to live in a world remote from reality.

For example, astromathematicians have "proved" in the last hundred years that the Sun is distant from this planet by anywhere from 11,000,000 to 120,000,000 miles. One of the greatest figure jugglers of the lot—Simon Newcombe—"proved" mathematically and beyond all argument that heavier-than-air machines could never fly.

As recently as 1930 certain German mathematicians "proved" that the then-untried Focke Wulf *Ente* (the so-called flying backward airplane) was aerodynamically incapable of flight. It soared despite them. For several years one gang of expert astromathematicians has been "proving" that the universe is contracting while another gang has been "proving" that it is expanding; or that the galaxies are coming closer at tremendous velocities while receding at tremendous velocities.

Even the dogmatic Galton's own figures can be turned topsy-turvy. Without anything really conclusive to show how he arrived at this mystic result he calculated that 64,000,000,000 different fingerprint patterns are possible. This is an imposing string of noughts that most police officials accept as authoritative and no layman sees fit to question.

But the population of the world today is estimated at about 2,400,000,000, almost all of whom possess ten digits apiece and thus account for a grand total of 24,000,000,000 prints in actual existence. In three generations—two of which have passed since fingerprinting began—the total of prints shoots up to more than 70,000,000,000, a number much greater than Galton's estimated maximum of possible variations and therefore *on his own showing* including the certainty of repeated patterns.

The likelihood of repetition is stronger than any mathematical theorizing would suggest. As every professional gambler

knows, chance does not conform to any tidy-minded laws of statistics except over a long period of time. In defiance of all carefully calculated probabilities, numbers repeat themselves, combinations recur, sequences turn up time and again, often with such astounding persistence that one is compelled to suspect unknown laws of regularity functioning within the realms of seemingly haphazard chance.

In the estimation of eminent mathematicians the chance of two golfers holing in one in the same game is incredibly remote—yet it has been done again and again. The chance of someone drawing a complete suit at cards is so mathematically unlikely as not to happen more than three times in a century—but it does happen at least ten times a year.

The odds against two identical fingerprints existing at the same time are purely mathematical odds bearing no relation to reality. They represent a theory which remains a theory and is not a demonstrable fact. But it suits the convenience of our police officials to employ the theory as if it were a fact, reject the onus of proof which lies upon the user and not upon the critics, and suppress all evidence in disproof.

Yet in solemn actuality—dreadfully solemn for someone—four, five, six or more people may share a print and, such is the orneriness of chance, two of them may live next door to each other.

The latter possibility is increased to some extent by a never-publicized assault made on dactyloscopy's first law by another branch of science; seeking data on Mendelian theories certain biologists claim to have discerned hereditary traits in fingerprints. The naughty notion that prints may be passed down the line along with noses and dispositions is anathema to dactyloscopists and they have been quick to seek refuge in pores.

If, say the dactyloscopists, two fingerprints are sufficiently alike to cause doubts (which according to their own assertions they cannot be!), we can turn to poroscopy and settle the issue by microscopic analysis of the sweat-pores. This despite that pores are destructible, replaceable, can become clogged, can change shape and, in the case of people who work hard with their hands, can alter almost from day to day. When talking of pores the dactyloscopists are shifting ground without changing stance. Whatever damns dactyloscopy equally damns poroscopy.

It must be borne in mind that despite careful filing of millions of prints during the last few decades the proportion of the world's population so recorded is very small, a mere tithe. For every print on file there are hun-

dreds, thousands not on file. How then do they *know* that no two are alike? The answer is that *they do not know* even though they get every man jack of the world's police forces to roar in unison, "We do!"

But to those who whittle away our hard-won liberties it is a considerable matter of authoritative convenience to pretend that they do know beyond all argument and dispute. It is equally a matter of expedience to fasten the lid down on any awkward fact suggesting that they don't.

Back in the dear dead days of no-war anywhere in the world certain newspapers made the mistake of publishing a startler to the effect that a respectable citizen of New Jersey had been found to have a complete set of prints—ten in all—identical with those of another person recorded on police files. Authority took immediate alarm. The following day obedient newspapers contradicted the report, sang soothing editorial lullabies, assured their readers that Science with a big "S" (meaning dactyloscopy, no less!) was "vindicated."

Noting this journalistic slip-up, a learned society emitted a howl of wrath, demanded to know who had ordered the newspapers to retract. The question was ignored because at that time nobody was hep to the present-day fashion of refusing to answer "for reasons of security." The incident has passed into the morgues of the press but unfortunately for the fingerprinters it hasn't been forgotten.

Post-war came another story about a character with no fingerprints at all. He had been born without any. That yarn too was given the treatment. Next an underworld character forged a fingerprint. Authority blundered badly by saying that he'd been clever but hadn't fooled them, then thought again and denied that he'd done it at all. Nobody knows better than the boys in power that the technique of *suppressio veri* is a highly effective method of conditioning minds into unprotesting surrender of individual rights.

Psychologists, and psychiatrists have long taken an especial interest in identical twins. We have lost count of their articles on this intriguing subject all of which are significant in that they omit the dactyloscopic aspect of the matter. The millions of words spewed forth about the Dionne Quintuplets have included not one sentence about their fingerprints.

The subject is a twentieth century tabu without which the world's witch-doctors cannot cow the tribal braves. Obviously any undue nosiness about the matter can lead to only two results equally undesirable: it will tend to confirm the first law of dactyloscopy and thereby draw atten-

tion to the fact that it needs confirmation, or it will consign said law to the ashcan, an inexpedient and highly undesirable fate in the opinion of those who gaily push us around.

The real menace of this law which is not a law, but only a vulnerable theory, is greater than most folk realize. It is rarely indeed that police can extract a complete set of ten prints from any investigated locale. More often than not the dactyloscopic part of any evidence they dig up consists of three or four prints, two or three of which may be smudged beyond possibility of systematic examination, leaving only one print sharp and clear—and maybe not a complete print at that.

Nevertheless a police expert can then swear before the court—and with complete sincerity—that such of this one print as there is has been found to correspond in ten, twelve or fifteen details with part of a full print on police files. There being nobody prepared to challenge this evidence and reduce it to its real worth (which is precisely nothing), the witness's words are accepted as an incontrovertible scientific pronouncement, twenty-four carat stuff. It carries weight—like a rope!

There is room for challenge. Production in court of two microphotographs of prints sworn to have fifteen points of similarity is a completely meaningless performance unless the first law of dactyloscopy can be demonstrated to be true—and the onus of the proof lies squarely on the prosecution. The prosecution has never proved it or as much as attempted to do so. The so-called first law of dactyloscopy has never been more than asserted in the loud, bullying voice of one determined not to abandon an extremely convenient faith.

The number of countable individualistic features in any one print are considerably less than the number in one face, which means that the odds against two similar faces should be far greater than those against two prints. Yet twins exist in thousands of pairs and it has been truly said that somewhere or other every man has his perfect double. And for every facial image of oneself there may well exist dactyloscopic duplicates.

In this lunatic day and age and perhaps more so in times to come increasing vigilance remains the price of lesser liberty. We are all beset by wizardry that is faked, bedevilled by warlocks disguised in somebody's discarded curtains. Preservation of human dignity and sometimes of human life depends on ability to detect the faces behind the masks or at least recognize the nature of the masks. The better you get to know them the better your chance of dying in bed.

laura rarely takes chances

by . . . Norman Daniels

Picking up a hitchhiker is highly dangerous, no matter how amiable his aspect may be. But if you're clever your life may be spared.

ONLY THE TRIP home on the fifth day was different. The fifth day was Friday afternoon when Charley Slade had acquired the habit of drawing in to the curb at the turn-off to pick up a hitchhiker whom he knew as Phil Marbury.

The usual trip consisted solely of a dash from the office, accompanied by a brief prayer that the parking lot wouldn't be too busy to enable him to get out quickly, head across town at 72nd Street, climb the ramp to the speedway and reach it before the commuter crowd got going.

Then north, past the Jersey cutoff and the bridge to Saw Mill River Parkway, where the long drive home became a simple matter of keeping a reasonable distance behind the car ahead.

Each Friday afternoon for three months, Phil Marbury had been at the turn-off when Charley left Saw Mill River Road. The first time it had been Laura's idea to give him a lift. He looked like a pleasant, friendly young man and the brief case he in-

A recent, widely popular mystery novel terminates with a most astonishing footnote. The author, as a matter of conscience, apologizes for not mentioning a very insidious poison by its correct pharmaceutical name. He wishes to spare disgruntled husbands the necessity of thumbing through innumerable medical textbooks. Here the shoe is on the other foot and the poison is in a strange category indeed. And yet—the same gentle wisdom might well apply.

evitably carried wasn't something a cheap hitch-hiker would be likely to need.

Laura's intuition had proven correct. Phil had turned out to be an employee of an outlying manufacturing plant who—because he had no car of his own—was compelled to beg a ride as far as the turn-off. Once there, he had no difficulty in negotiating another.

Because he went home only once a week his problem wasn't too difficult and since Charley had come to expect him Phil had gotten into the habit of turning down other offers. Charley would drive him four miles to the highway where he could catch a bus that took him all the way home. Phil was most grateful, embarrassingly so at times.

And there Marbury stood now, smiling in friendly fashion, the brown, heavy brief case in his hand. Charley stopped, and Phil got aboard quickly. He put the brief case down on the floor between his legs, and relaxed with a sigh.

"Nice day," Phil said.

"Very nice," Charley agreed. "It's actually getting balmy. Pretty soon we'll be having spring rains. The grass will start turning green, crocuses will stick their nasty little heads out of the ground and leaves will start budding on the trees." He smiled ironically. "A beautiful time of year, Mr. Marbury."

"I guess you're right," was Phil's comment.

"Yes," Charley said, "most people see it that way. They feel their blood stirring at the sight of the tiny green leaves. I see them growing, turning brown and having to be raked. I see the grass turning green too—and long—so it has to be cut. Then there's the problem of painting. I've put it off for three years now, but Laura won't stand for another postponement."

"I take it," Phil said, "that you don't like suburbia."

"My idea of a sweet life," Charley said, "is a three-room apartment. A really nice one, mind you. I want a doorman to salute me, elevator operators to talk about the weather. I want to sleep on my mornings off—and if there's any work to be done, you merely get the building super to handle it."

"I don't mean to be inquisitive," Phil said. "But if you don't like the suburbs, why do you live there?"

Charley smiled.

"That's easy. Laura likes it. She likes the grass and the crocuses and the little leaves. She likes a house painted white and a picket fence that takes you five consecutive weekends to daub with paint." Charley glanced at Phil and laughed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shoot my mouth off that way. I guess I've had too much time to think lately."

"But aren't you working every day?"

"I am, of course. But Laura is on a cruise. You must remember Laura quite well, even though you only met her once."

"I certainly do. A charming woman and—a beautiful one. You're lucky."

"Laura hates the water, and being confined to a ship drives her half out of her mind. She also detests the tropics. So what does she do? She takes a cruise to Bermuda. I just don't understand women. I especially don't understand Laura."

"She's lucky she can go as she pleases," Phil said. "Most husbands wouldn't like it."

"Laura has a mind of her own, Phil. She's got the money in this family and—but I'm talking too much again." He slowed up for a stop sign, craned his neck in either direction and turned into the highway. Five hundred yards further along was the bus stop. Charley shifted gears and pulled in to the curb.

"Thanks," Phil said. "I wish you'd let me buy you a tank of gas sometime—or a bottle of perfume or a box of candy for your wife. I'm very grateful for this lift, you know."

"It costs me nothing," Charley said. "Forget it. I'll see you next week."

Phil stepped out of the car, shut the door and walked toward the bus station. The bus was already moving toward him. Charley made a U-turn, headed back, and turned off at the same intersection.

Five minutes later he was rolling into the garage where he'd left the doors wide open. It amused him to reflect that Laura would never have put up with that if she had been at home to supervise his departure from the living room window.

He shut off the motor, picked up his newspaper, and closed the garage doors. Then he strode across the front lawn and let himself into the seven-room, two-story house. It smelled a bit musty, but a man couldn't reasonably be expected to air a house and work in a New York office at one and the same time. He flung open a window and stood by the sill for a moment, breathing in the sweet air.

Then he took off his topcoat and hat, threw them on the back of a chair in the hallway, added his suit coat to the heap and ambled into the kitchen. From a built-in wall cabinet he took took down a bottle of liquor, poured a single shot and drank it neat. He rinsed out the glass, put it back in the cabinet and went to the living room.

He looked out of the window again for a couple of minutes. That cherry tree would have to be pruned soon if he expected any of those blood-red, sour, evil-tasting little bits of fruit to

appear on its branches. The ground around the lilac bushes needed softening too. He turned away, drifted to a chair and sat down. He wriggled himself deeper into the groove he'd worn in the cushions, picked up his paper and settled back.

With the tree pruning and earth loosening out of his mind, he could relax. The full jigger of whiskey warmed him. He hooked the petit-point chair with a toe, dragged it over and put both feet on it.

He had finished the comics, sports, editorials and was turning to the news section of the paper when the door buzzer startled him. He got up and went softly to the window where he could look out and, with luck, not be seen himself. Laura had made such eavesdropping an art and had always gotten away with it. A salesman or a neighbor would fail to find anyone at home, and would depart grumbling.

Phil Marbury touched the doorbell again. Charley went around to the hall and let him in.

Phil was duly apologetic. "I left my brief case in your car, Mr. Slade. I'm terribly sorry."

"I hadn't even noticed it," Charley said. "Come on in—I'll get it for you. Make yourself at home."

While Phil settled down in a living room chair, Charley went to the garage and quickly found the brief case. It had been pushed back against the seat so that it was hardly noticeable. He picked it up, noticing for the first time that it was both bulky and surprisingly heavy. He hefted it in astonishment, shrugged and went back into the house. He put it on a chair in the hallway and returned into the living room.

Phil started to get up. Charley said, "Relax, Phil—unless you're in a big hurry."

"No . . . no. In fact, I'm in no hurry at all. But I didn't want to intrude. It was stupid enough of me to forget the brief case."

"I'm lonesome," Charley said bluntly. "Have a drink with me. Unless you have someone waiting—"

"No, I'm single. I live with an unmarried sister, but she never really expects me. I'm not a creature of habit."

"I'm getting to be," Charley said. "And I'm heartily sick of it. Will you have a drink, Phil?"

"Sure thing," Phil said. "It doesn't make any difference what—just make it with soda."

"Come on out to the kitchen," Charley said. "I keep the stuff there."

Phil rubber-necked a little. "I like your house," he said. "It's snug and comfortable."

"And mortgaged," Charley said. "Funny thing about Laura. She has money of her own—a great deal of money—but she

maintains that a man is supposed to finance his own house. So—I pay an unholy sum of interest every year. It's uncalled for—uncharitable too."

He pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen and they went in. Phil held back a little, staring out into the back yard. Charley took down two tall glasses and carefully washed them with a soap-smeared cloth. He dried them to an extreme polish and held each one to the light for a final, critical study. Phil watched him curiously.

"Think I'm finicky, don't you?" Charley said. "The fact is, I'm not."

He removed from the cabinet an opened bottle of liquor, frowned doubtfully, shoved it back on the shelf again and went to another cabinet. Phil watched him remove a fresh fifth.

"Oh, the other stuff is perfectly all right," Phil said. "The opened bottle, I mean."

"We'll use this," Charley said.

He held the bottle up to the window and stared through the amber liquid. Then he held it higher and looked through the bottom of the bottle. He tilted it slightly, then more and more until he was holding it upside down while he studied the contents of the neck.

Finally he set it on the drainboard, bent his knees and brought his face very close to the seal. He examined it, rotating the bottle slowly. At last he cut the seal, removed the stopper and poured a generous portion into each of the sparkling clean glasses.

He turned on the cold water tap, and held his glass under it for a second. Then he reached for Phil's.

Phil stopped him. "Hold on," he said. "I don't like mine with plain water, if you don't mind."

Charley turned off the water, and handed him the glass. "You don't look like a straight drinker. I'm sorry."

"But there were bottles of soda—"

"I wouldn't advise using them," Charley said. "They've been on the shelf since before Laura left. Let's go back to the living room. Oh, I'm sorry—I've some ice that's all right. A tray I made myself only yesterday."

"No, thanks," Phil said slowly. "If I have to drink it straight—Look here, why can't we use the soda? I'm just curious, that's all."

Charley shook his head from side to side. "I'm sorry. I'd rather not talk about it. I'll take along the bottle."

They talked about baseball, the stock market, business in general. They decided that the current trends in all three were good. Charley had two more portions of whiskey, Phil only one. From the way he drank the stuff,

it was easy to see he didn't like it straight.

Charley said, "I'll start talking a blue streak any minute. I always do after my third or fourth. You don't mind sticking around?"

"Not at all. It's a pleasure, Charley."

"Good," Charley said. "We'll have something to eat presently. Just so long as I eat, I can go on drinking without making a spectacle of myself. So you're not married."

"Not yet," Phil said.

"Ah," Charley wagged a finger, "so there *is* someone. Do you want a little advice from a man already ground to a pulp by the marriage mill? Make sure she hasn't any money. And that she hasn't been married before. Make very sure of that."

Phil looked a bit blank. "Oh? Then your wife was married before?"

"Twice." Charley held up two fingers and regarded them solemnly. "Look, I'm okay. They don't shake a bit, do they?"

"You haven't even begun," Phil said. "As I remember your wife, she looked almost too young to have been married three times."

"Short marriages, my boy. Husbands cut off in their prime. Both had money. That's how she happens to have more than me. Her first husband was a chemist. A toxicologist—one of those fellows who knows all about poisons."

"May I," Phil asked, "have another drink?"

"Sure—and don't worry one bit. That bottle's okay. You can't pierce a bottle except with a white-hot needle and that always leaves a little bubble or a rough abrasion. Can't miss it."

"I don't understand." Phil had the bottle poised above the glass.

"To introduce some alien substance, you know. It's been done that way. Right through the cork too. But you have to pierce the seal and that shows up."

Phil Marbury put the bottle down. "I don't understand this, Mr. Slade."

Charley had another. "As soon this one warms me I'll really start talking," he warned. "We'd better eat something."

Charley walked somewhat too erect on his way to the kitchen, but the hand holding the glass was steady. Phil followed him. Charley finished half his drink, opened double doors to a cabinet and revealed a row of canned goods.

"What'll it be, friend? About everything there. Laura saw to that."

"I really don't care," Phil said. "I like everything."

"Hash then. Corned beef hash," Charley said. "I'll make it in a jiffy. I'll put on chili sauce—Laura makes good chili

—and you'll have a dish fit for a king."

He turned the can over and over in his hand, and finally carried it to the window. He slit and removed the label and examined the tin underneath. Finally he opened it, dumped out the hash and picked it apart with a fork.

"Forgive my bluntness," Phil said. "But you act like a man who expects his food might be poisoned."

"For myself, Phil, I wouldn't mind so much. But a guest like you—" He finished his inspection of the hash and took a frying pan from a drawer. He scoured it, rinsed and wiped it well. Then he removed a quarter pound cube of butter from the refrigerator, and said as he unwrapped it, "I bought this myself, so I know it's all right."

He made patties of the hash, fried them slowly and transferred them to a plate.

Phil said, "Those bottles of soda—you won't serve me any because you think they may have been tampered with."

Charley opened the refrigerator door and rummaged until he found a mason jar of chili sauce. "Let's say that sometimes it pays to be careful."

"But are you trying to tell me that you suspect your wife of poisoning your liquor and food?"

"Juggle your own plate," Charley said. The whiskey was breaking down his courtesy as a host. "I'll pick up the knives and forks."

They went out to the dining room. Charley opened the bottle of chili sauce—he had to use his knife to do it—and handed the opened jar to Phil.

"Laura makes fine chili sauce. Sweet and mild—just green stuff. Good chili should never be red hot."

He reached across the table and took back the jar. He stared at it, put the jar down and dug into it with his knife. When he withdrew the blade there was a small chunk of black, jellylike substance adhering to it.

"Ever see anything like that in chili sauce before, Phil? It just proves a man in my position can't get careless for an instant."

"Now see here," Phil said, "if you think your wife is trying to poison you, why not go to the police?"

Charley grinned and shook his head. "Reasons, my boy. Big reasons. Let's just say I'm in no position to complain about Laura."

Phil slowly put down his fork, leaving the hash untasted. "Charley, you told me her first husband was a toxicologist. Is that how she learned about poisons?"

"Naturally. All sorts of lethal information."

"What happened to that husband?"

Charley said, "I don't really know. I wasn't around in those days. I met Laura after she had married again."

"And—her second husband?"

"He had more money than the first. He died too, quite suddenly. Just sickened and died—right after Laura met me. It could have been a nasty mess if anybody had regarded that death as suspicious."

"I think I understand," Phil said slowly.

"Of course," Charley added, "both husbands were cremated. Laura insisted on that. Now there may be nothing to this, but I didn't like the way Laura suddenly made up her mind to go on a trip alone. But, I still might not have wondered if she had not left me some beef stew. She knows how fond I am of it."

"You—ate it?" Phil asked.

"Well, no. After Laura went off I felt as if I'd been let out of prison. I stayed in town, and ate in restaurants. I had myself a royal time. Then one day—three days after she'd left—I remembered the stew. It looked all right, but well—left over that long—you know how it is. I set it out for the dogs. Next day Mrs. Parkins—down the street a bit—made a complaint to the police that somebody had poisoned her doberman. Believe me, I took in that empty dish real fast."

Phil pushed his plate away. "You'll pardon me if I'm not hungry, Charley. And if I leave."

"I don't blame you," Charley said. "Thanks anyway, for the short visit. You can see why I don't dare invite friends as I'd like to do."

"Charley," Phil said, "tell me honestly, do you think she left poisoned food behind?"

Charley looked up at Phil. "Let's put it this way. I think Laura has met another man. I keep remembering the time she met me while her second husband was still alive. He lived such a short time after that. However, Laura is no fool. In fact, I was overwhelmed when I learned that the dog had died—because a woman as resourceful as Laura would hardly try to use the same means of murder three times in a row."

"Yes, hardly that," Phil agreed in a hollow voice.

"She may well have had other plans for me, but left the food properly doctored so that in the event that one plan failed, another might succeed. Laura rarely takes chances."

Phil shuddered. "And you can't go to the police because they might involve you in the second murder?"

"Oh, I didn't say that. I had no idea what killed the poor fellow. But I hate trouble."

"Do you mind if I leave now?" Phil asked.

"I'll see you next Friday," Charley said. "Let me walk to the door with you. And this time don't forget your brief case."

Phil clutched the case hard as he shook hands with Charley and then turned and walked rapidly from the house. Charley watched him for a few moments. Then he returned into the house. He went to the telephone and dialed.

"Let me talk to Attorney Semmerall," he said, and hummed a little tune while he waited. "Hello, Fred? This is Charley. You can go ahead with the divorce now. And notify Laura at the Bermuda address I gave you. Tell her I'm keeping the house and everything in our joint bank account. Tell her my decision is unalterable."

Attorney Semmerall was rightfully cautious. "She can sue you to a stand still on that, Charley."

"She won't. Tell her, in your letter, that Philip Marbury came to see me."

"Good heavens!" Semmerall cried out. "Then it *did* work out. He believed what you told him—"

"Of course he did. And I didn't underestimate Marbury. He carried a length of iron pipe in his brief case. I could feel it. But he changed his mind—even though the stage was pretty well set. What with Laura in Bermuda and me trusting strangers the police would quite naturally have assumed that an unknown intruder had burglarized the house, and killed me in a struggle."

"I'll be sure to explain all that to Laura."

"Draw her a picture if necessary," Charley said. "She's never gone through a divorce before. Nor a true marriage either, for that matter. And will you draw up the papers for the sale of this house? I have a customer who'll pay a good price."

"I'll have them ready tomorrow, Charley. You're well rid of that woman. I thought you were daydreaming when you said you were sure she meant to have you killed."

"No," Charley said, "she was daydreaming to think she could get away with it. Good night, Fred. See you tomorrow."

Charley walked back into the dining room. The hash was still warm. He transferred the untouched portion on Phil's plate to his own. He poured chili sauce over it and ate with considerable pleasure.

He had always maintained that about the only good point Laura had was her proficiency in the art of making chili sauce.

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Murder, mayhem and crime in a lighter vein evoke high praise from our critic—in their proper, library-shelf roles, of course.

WHEN IS A Flea Club not a Flea Club? John Canaday, better known as MATTHEW HEAD, always one of this column's favorite mystery writers, answers this and more urgent questions in MURDER AT THE FLEA CLUB (Simon and Schuster, $2.75). The seventh Matthew Head novel in fourteen years, the present volume is proof, if proof be needed, that the field has not surrendered to any really important extent to the Spillanism-cum-formula school, and that it still includes distinguished writers with Mr. Canaday's gift for gentle—but extremely competent—dissection of our foibles and our fears.

Dr. Mary Finney, medical missionary and by now somewhat more than amateur detective, who normally runs into unpleasantness in the shadows of the Congo, ploughs through frustrations and complexes and what feeds on them with the same single-mindedness which she demonstrated in earlier reports. Somehow—we never quite discover why—Hooper Talliaferro

There are literary chaps we know who could not edit a famed mystery book club for seven years without becoming either blase or conceited. Mr. Santesson is neither. He remains as always fair-mindedly himself—a true gentleman of the quill with a straight-from-the-shoulder incisiveness which extracts the kernel from crime's darkly-grooved walnut with a deftness delightful to behold.

finds himself running "a sort of art gallery" in Paris, and getting a year of the city—American style—out of his blood. In the process of doing so he runs into a beautiful and rather unhappy young girl, and some far less attractive—but also unhappy—older women. It all adds up to murder, told with the suspense-engendering skill of which Matthew Head is a past master. Recommended.

A number of mystery story shibboleths, including the myth of the strong, silent, eagle-eyed Secret Service man, are dealt severe body-blows in Dr. Michael Bialoguski's interesting THE CASE OF COLONEL PETROV (McGraw-Hill, $3.75). There are times when we may wonder what would have happened if spy-master Petrov had been stationed in Washington. Would a man like Bialoguski have been given the same run-around as he was accorded "Down Under"? Would there have been the same failure to instantly appreciate what Petrov's defection might have led to? I seriously doubt it!

The man who was slated to succeed Petrov as head of Soviet espionage in Australia has made an important contribution to our documented knowledge concerning the thinking of latter-day Russia where a new bureaucratic caste has replaced the aristocracy of the Czarist regime—a caste equally cliquish and equally ruthless and indifferent to the welfare of the common man. Bialoguski's "The Case of Colonel Petrov" is the story of how and why Vladimir Petrov turned his back on that new Russia. This is an important case study which should be required reading for many of us. Recommended.

THE MAN OUT OF THE RAIN (Doubleday, $2.75), a group of stories by Philip MacDonald, is fully as satisfying as his "Something to Hide." Exciting indeed is the story of the man who went to considerable trouble to keep his word to a very young friend. And there is the story of what happened to a much too charming man—a youth who came out of the rain—and a further report on the less publicized activities of the Alcazar Foundation for Psychic Research. Recommended.

Superintendent Hant was certain that the suspect was a murderer. And he thought he knew how Captain Charles Rathlyn had killed the woman who, weeks earlier, had poured out a stream of abuse and accusation, and had then flung her arms around him—"Oh, love me, Charlie, love me! I've got no one in the world but you!" There was a most ominous motive. In fact there seemed to be several motives . . .

Henry Wade, author of a number of other effective excursions into literate crime, introduces us, in A DYING FALL (Macmillan, $2.75), to a group of thoroughly credible and even appealing men and women as they are confronted with dark violence, including the rather complicated Superintendent Hant . . . Recommended.

"Oh no," protested the murderer. "I shouldn't like you to think a thing like that about me. I've liked you all very much." E. X. Ferrars' ENOUGH TO KILL A HORSE (Doubleday, $2.75), describes what happened when politeness—and even genuine affection—concealed a diabolical recourse to poison. A group of people who knew each other and liked each other and even had faith in each other, after a fashion, were disturbed, to put it mildly, when their calm and quiet was tragically threatened. E. X. Ferrars, as always, is a subtle and satisfying portraitist of what, for want of a better term, may be described as the vast English middle class. Recommended.

ISABEL CAPETO'S A FEW DROPS OF MURDER (Arcadia House, $2.50) is a mild and rather pleasant account of an unorthodox slaying, which will undoubtedly leave you considerably more relaxed than you would be after putting down a triumph of the "love 'em and slay 'em" school.

IAN FLEMING'S third novel, MOONRAKER (Macmillan, $2.75) is described as the third and "breathless best" of his "atomic-powered thrillers," an unsuspected byproduct of our age. We are told that "adrenalin flows from his pen." This is perhaps true—but this commentator wouldn't swear to it! "Moonraker" *is* a competent British thriller, with the background carefully—perhaps almost too carefully—etched out before the action gets under way. Secret Service agent James Bond, in the course of protecting England from a brilliant but rather unbalanced enemy, fights his way through a satisfying series of complications. Read it by all means—if you haven't already done so.

It seems that Andrew Garve will never write another novel like "Fontego's Folly." The slicks have got him . . . This is to be regretted, perhaps, but his latest, THE RIDDLE OF SAMSON (Harper, $2.75), is "agreeably atmospheric," to quote John W. Vandercook. It is a first-rate report of murder as it comes to the Scilly Isles and John Lavery blunders his way to the startling solution across wet sands, over treacherous rocks, and with the

sea thundering in the background. Recommended.

Can you be murdered twice in the same evening? Richard and Frances Lockridge, in LET DEAD ENOUGH ALONE (Lippincott, $2.75) reports on a preoccupied Captain Heimrich's search for a killer among the oddly assorted New Year's Eve guests at an isolated Westchester mansion. The discovery of the dead man interrupts the captain's holiday plans—plans which, for once, had *not* included murder. The killer strikes again—needlessly, this time—and Heimrich is able to finally relax and anticipate pleasanter moments, while a very unhappy man laughs, shrilly, hysterically . . .

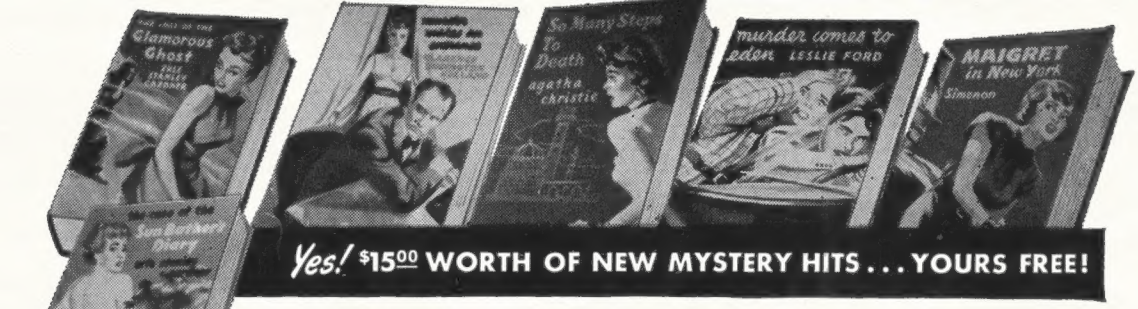
Lee Roberts' JUDAS JOURNEY (Dodd Mead, $2.75) is an interesting example of a less gentle trend in the field.

"She looked marvelous as she had always looked. Erect and slim, with glossy black hair falling over her shoulders. Her lips were parted and her dark eyes searched his face."

And minutes later Marcia was beyond hate and love, "especially her kind of love . . ."

Rack Ramsey, searching for the man who had killed the woman he had almost married, runs into some extremely unpleasant people with even more unpleasant habits. Rack feels a little sick, "like a man trying to kill a snake that won't die," and there comes a moment when he knows, with absolute certainty, who has killed Marcia and tried to frame him. He realizes then that he has been on a long, dark journey, a Judas journey.

MIKE ROSCOE's publishers suggest that "if you prefer the gentler make-believe, we recommend that you skip ONE TEAR FOR MY GRAVE and trot down to your library for some Sherlock Holmes stories." There is an obvious temptation to underline this suggestion. But, in all fairness to Mr. Roscoe—perhaps the only writer in this field who actually *is* a private detective—"One Tear for My Grave" (Crown, $2.50) should be read by those of you who like this school of writing. By far the best of the Johnny April novels, this free-swinging report on what happens when a man gets murdered before he has had a chance to pay his bookies is competent Spillanism (or is it spelled Roscoeism?), complete with its warmer moments. It is comforting to realize that Kansas City, scene of these rather violent happenings, does have some of the lusher amenities of State and Rush Streets.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